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James Lenox.

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Milner-

PRACTICAL SERMONS,

BY THE LATE

REV. JOSEPH MILNER, A. M.

VICAR OF THE HOLY TRINITY CHURCH,

KINGSTON-UPON-HULL.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

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PREFACE.

AS, through the medium of several periodical works, it has been made known to the public that the late Dean of Carlisle bequeathed his Brother's MSS. to the Editor of the present volume, its appearance more than three years after the lamented death of that great man may require explanation. Some may wonder that the publication has been so long deferred; while others may be disposed to ask, why, from a stock of sermons out of which two large volumes had been already selected, a third should be now produced.

The fact is, that the Editor did not venture on this step without considerable hesitation. He was afraid, lest, when his materials had been twice sifted, and each time what appeared the choicest taken away, he should not be able to furnish a volume equal in excellence to the former two, and at the same time affording a sufficient variety. These apprehensions he repeatedly expressed to friends who urged

him to publish; and it was uniformly answered, that a volume of Sermons from such a man as JOSEPH MILNER must be acceptable, and must do good.

To these representations he at length yielded; and the further he proceeded in his task, the more was he inclined to acquiesce in the judgment of those who made them.

Having thus explained why he publishes at all, he has only further to state how he has proceeded in preparing for the press the Discourses now offered to the public. As they were originally written, not only without the smallest view to publication, but in a much shorter time than is allowed even by the most ready writers for the composition of a sermon, they could hardly fail to require many corrections. Inaccuracies, or slovenly sentences, which haste had occasioned, the Author himself, it may be presumed, would have been disposed to correct. Faults of this kind the Editor *has* corrected, and that not sparingly.

Yet, in making such corrections, he has always remembered, that, though he might strip the style of Milner of what was negligent or offensive, he was by no means warranted to substitute another for it. He was conscious that he could not do his Author a greater in-

TO THE

REV. JAMES STILLINGFLEET, A. M.

RECTOR OF HOTHAM, YORKSHIRE;

THESE SERMONS,

WRITTEN

BY ONE WITH WHOM HE OFTEN TOOK SWEET COUNSEL,

AND WALKED AS

WITH A FRIEND AND A BROTHER,

ARE INSCRIBED BY THE EDITOR,

BOTH

THAT THE KINDNESS OF A RECTOR

TO THE CURATE ORDAINED ON HIS TITLE

MAY BE ACKNOWLEDGED

BY THIS TRIBUTE OF AFFECTION AND ESTEEM,

AND

THAT THE NAMES OF

STILLINGFLEET AND MILNER

MAY STAND ASSOCIATED

IN A LASTING MEMORIAL.

trifling, he has inserted them, and omitted them where it was considerable.

Having thus stated the principles by which he has been guided in executing his task, the Editor will take his leave, with an earnest prayer that the blessing of the Most High may accompany this posthumous work of His now glorified servant.

J. FAWCETT.

Parsonage, Carlisle,
Oct. 23, 1823.

jury than to exhibit him in a dress which was not his own.

The great beauty of MILNER is, that no one can read a sermon of his without being convinced that he is in earnest. In every page we see a preacher concerned only to vindicate the ways of God to men, and to save the souls of his hearers. Engrossed by this great object, he loses sight of every other. He cannot stay to trim his sentences, or round his periods; for he is aiming at the souls of his audience, and therefore has not leisure to consult their taste. Perhaps he may have carried this inattention to words to an extreme; nor does the Editor wish to recommend his Author's method to general imitation. But in the negligence of MILNER, combined with his strong sense and deep piety, there is a dignity which more laboured compositions do not often reach. His appeals to the conscience, though rough, are in a high degree forcible; and there is often an exquisite tenderness, with a natural eloquence, which at once makes its way to the heart.

Not to spoil all this by an officious emendation has been the Editor's great care. It would, he conceives, be barbarism of the worst kind, by pruning and polishing to deprive such a writer of his characteristic vigour.

He has therefore been more afraid of doing too much than of doing too little. And, though his minor corrections have been very numerous, yet the result of pretty long consideration of a questionable sentence has not seldom been, to let it remain in its original state.

After these explanations of the qualified liberties which the Editor has taken with the *style* of his Author, it is scarcely necessary for him to say, that he has taken none at all with the *sense*. In altering the phraseology of a sentence, he has been careful not to alter its meaning.

One thing more it may be proper to add.—The quotations from the Bible or Prayer-book have been carefully examined; but in making these quotations, it is to be observed, that Mr. Milner frequently changes the number or person of a pronoun, or tense of a verb, that the passage quoted may fall in more naturally with the tenor of his discourse. To restore such passages to their original state would not be to *correct* the *inadvertence* of the Author, but to *depart* from his *intention*. In such cases, nothing was left for the Editor to consider, but whether he should or should not apply the inverted commas. Where the change was

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SERMON I.

THE SUDDEN DESTRUCTION OF OBDURATE OFFENDERS.

PROVERBS xxix. 1.

He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

THIS passage describes, what wicked men ought indeed to take particular notice of, the manner in which the Lord exercises his judgments towards them. It is his way to give long warning, because he willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live. He warns by the admonitions of conscience; by his Spirit, word, and ministry; or by the dealings of his providence: therefore it is said, "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed." If the wicked remain still hardened and obstinate, then, when he becomes ripe for destruction, it is said, he "shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." So that it should seem from this description, that, notwithstanding the long train of warnings he may have had, after all, partly

through the growing hardness of his heart, and partly through the just judgment of God, when he is effectually destroyed it is quite on a sudden. Nay, he might naturally imagine himself in less danger of perishing then, when he does perish, than at any other time; his former escapes from imminent dangers, which at first he was wont to fear, having contributed to harden his neck, and make him ripe for destruction. What an awful lesson here for wicked men! Are any of you now less and less molested with a troubled conscience; can you now laugh at those religious pangs you once had in hearing the Gospel, as the effects of superstition? it is a sign you have hardened your neck: beware! you have been often reproved; when your destruction does come (which it will if you continue hardened), the text tells you it will not give warning; your destruction shall be *sudden*, and that *without remedy*.

That the lesson of the text may be the better understood, I would, before I apply it to our own times, give a few Scripture instances of it. Perhaps from them it may appear to be a common way of the Lord's dealings with the world.

Behold Ahab, king of Israel. There was none like unto him, who did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord; who did very abominably also in following idols; who had four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and

four hundred prophets of the groves, which ate at the table of Jezebel his wife. He is often reproved: the prophet Elijah by his prayers fetches down fire from heaven: his false prophets can do nothing by their prayers, but shew the vanity of the god they worshipped: yet does he harden his neck still, and, by the impulse of his wicked wife, he persecutes Elijah; and, in the case of Naboth the Jezreelite, adds theft and murder to idolatry. Here he is reproved again; and judgment also is tempered with mercy in the manner of inflicting it. Nay, he reigns prosperously, and gains two signal victories over the Syrians. Thus does he, "after his hardness and impenitent heart, treasure up to himself wrath against the day of wrath." He goes fearlessly to Ramoth-Gilead, though Micaiah, from the mouth of God, had denounced he should perish there. He enters into the midst of the battle; a certain man draws a bow, "at a venture" the expression is; it had a commission, however, to execute the Lord's decree on wicked Ahab; to destroy *him* suddenly, who had often been reproved in vain: and "in the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, did dogs lick his blood," as Elijah had foretold.

Behold hard-hearted Pharaoh. His pride and cruelty, the repeated chastisements by various plagues inflicted on him, his deceitful promises of amendment, and his growing hardness of heart on the whole, under the most

powerful reproofs, all must know who are at all acquainted with Old-Testament history. It is not enough to observe that he was at last destroyed: the peculiar manner in which he was destroyed is that which calls for our attention, according to the text. Long does God wait; full oft does he warn you, O wicked men; but when he does destroy, it is not only a full destruction, but it gives no warning. Pharaoh, pursuing the Israelites, has no idea of being drowned in the Red Sea: that was a providence he never would have suspected.

But why dwell we on single persons? Behold Sodom and Gomorrah. No doubt they had been warned and reproved very often by righteous Lot, whom God had sent to live among them some time before their destruction. What so much awes and checks wicked men as the opposite example of the godly? No doubt Lot, though silent, must have reproved them by his righteous conduct. But was he silent? We are told that he vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds, and no doubt he would testify against their wickedness: "Nay, my brethren, do not so wickedly," was his language. Thus Sodom and Gomorrah had long warning. Were they not also suddenly cut off, according to the text? I cannot shew this in a more lively manner than in our Lord's words; "As it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they

builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all."

Were not the men of Noah's generation also warned a long season? Yes: we are told that "the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah while the ark was a preparing." He is called by St. Peter a preacher of righteousness. How often, and how loudly, did he in his day warn them of their wicked ways, and assure them of the speedy approach of vengeance! Uncharitable moping enthusiast, we may well suppose, was the title he got for his pains among them. Many, too, would, no doubt, vindicate their crimes, and attempt to prove that he represented God as an unmerciful Being. In sin they continued, hardening their necks: but when at length their destruction came (God gives long warning, but fully and suddenly he destroys at last), this was the manner of it, according to our Lord: "In the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark; and knew not until the flood came and took them all away."

What is to be learnt from these things, since it appears that this is the Lord's usual method of proceeding? Let wicked men awake out of sleep, lest sudden destruction overtake them. For I have one more instance to produce, the most important of all

scenes, in which we are all concerned,—the *day of judgment;* that glorious, awful day, which will complete the happiness of the just, and the destruction of the wicked. This day "will come as a thief in the night; for when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape." It seems, then, wicked men will be eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, as in the days of Lot, when the trump of God shall announce the coming of the Judge of quick and dead; when all the dead, and all the living, must stand before him. What a sight! "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." Then they who, having been often reproved, have hardened their necks, shall suddenly be destroyed indeed, and that without remedy. But have we not long warning? Yes; all of us: so long, that too many wicked men allow themselves in scoffing, walking after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? for, since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." But, notwithstanding their scoffs, vengeance, though slow, is sure; and when it does come, it will come suddenly. In the mean time, God exercises great long-suffering, not willing that

any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But come it will. "The day of the Lord will come, as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up." (2 Pet. iii.)

O that we might dwell upon this scene, my brethren! view it as real, as all-important, as that to which we all are hastening; and ask, What security have we against the sudden destruction then to overtake the wicked? Know you, that all will then be found wicked who reject the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, preached among you? Understand you this Gospel? Has it yet found a place in your hearts? Ah me, my people! I fear indeed it is far otherwise with too, too many of you. I wish indeed the number of you that have received the Gospel might be found large; but I fear it is exceedingly small. You have been often reproved, and have hardened your necks. If it be not so, if Christ Jesus be indeed believed on, and generally loved and regarded, in this town, how comes it that you bring forth no Christian fruit? Look at the practice of Christians as set forth in the New Testament. Is this your practice? is it not quite contrary? Who among you have yet introduced family prayer into your households? Who exhort their children and servants to fear God? Who of you have

any pleasure in conversing with one another concerning Jesus Christ and his salvation? What experience have you had of it in your souls? Mere moral civility, which even heathens may attain to, seems the utmost indeed you aim at. Too many, I fear, have not even this; but if you had this, it will save no man. Long and loudly have I preached among you, "Ye must be born again:" and how many have never yet in serious thought weighed what the new birth is! nay, are quite at ease, though they cannot give one scriptural mark that this change has passed upon them! And yet you have seen, or might see, living instances on whom this change has been wrought; what they were before conversion, and what they are now. One might think you should be stirred up to emulation. Ah! how dangerous the state of those who for some years have heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ unmoved, unaffected; remaining just as they were before they heard a word of it! To be sermon-proof may be to them matter of boasting; but what so dreadful! Let us, however, behold the awful day. If God's word be true, and you be unconverted, it will then appear that I have spoken the truth of God, and you would not hear it. Whither will you then flee? How can you bear the face of the terrible Judge—once the bleeding Redeemer!

I mention these things, in hopes it may please God still to give the Spirit of repentance

among you whose hearts the Gospel hitherto has not reached. It is not too late. Indeed, when you turn to God in self-condemnation, and are humbled to beg and long for the mercy of Jesus's Cross, you will be heard, and the kind Father of the returning prodigal will be your Father and your God.

Knowing, then, the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men. And let us mention some instances of condemnation at the last day. What will those persons say who have affected to despise the thoughts of Jesus's coming, and to treat it as a fable—who were prophesied of in Peter's Second Epistle—when suddenly they shall see Him come whom they have pierced, and looked on in a mean light, perhaps as a man only? When they shall see the glory of the Godhead upon him; when their own hearts, being laid open, shall shew that they stubbornly stifled their convictions, and sinned away the best means of grace, how will they look? Who will appear wise men then? No mercy now! but wrath unmixed, from the Lord of the earth, whose atoning blood they would not flee to when they might, though called and entreated over and over to flee to it as the only shelter from the wrath of God. No: sin they viewed as a slight thing. Yes, mark it: Deists, Socinians, formalists, and men of unsanctified orthodoxy, are all of one religion: they have slight views of sin. If it was not so, if sin appeared to them as it should do, as

rebellion against Infinite Goodness and Greatness, they would groan for a justification all by faith, since their works are all condemned; they would long for the new birth unto righteousness, since their natural state would appear to them evil altogether.

And now recollect, I pray you, the points which I have constantly inculcated on your minds. I have told you all along the necessity of being justified by faith in Christ. You would not be obliged to him for all your justification; what, then, will you do, when at the judgment day he will treat you as despisers of the Gospel? I have cried aloud, Except ye be converted ye cannot enter into heaven; what will ye do who sneer at the very idea of conversion? What if the Judge come and see you unconverted? Will you not fear now, while fear may do you good? I have set forth the necessity of being renewed in practice, in order for persons to evidence conversion to God; and, therefore, that no whoremonger, no drunkard, no covetous person, no lover of this world, has the love of the Father in him, or will be owned by Jesus when he comes to judgment: "Depart, ye cursed," will be the doom of them all.

I see one great hindrance which prevents the conversion of many who are not without serious moments,—"the fear of man bringeth a snare" (Prov. xxix. 25), and in that snare they are taken. They see at times something of the

necessity of conversion; and they see, in their own careless ungodly conduct, that which makes them suspect that they themselves are in a very bad state. But, then, they see they cannot stir a step in changing their way of life, their company, and their conversation; they cannot begin to pray, and make such profession of religion as to appear in earnest to save their souls; but they are taken notice of by all their former acquaintance as persons that are falling into a precise or melancholy way. Hence, contempt and scorn; hence, perhaps, some worldly losses or inconveniences. Persons, whose favour might be of consequence to them, may be affronted, and they may lose their bread. Such are the apprehensions of carnal wisdom. And there is no doubt but numbers in the world, through this fear of man, are ensnared, and choose rather to bear very disagreeable convictions, till they are worn off by degrees, than to combat the reproach of the world, and sustain some worldly inconveniences.

Are there any here whose conscience tells them that this is their case? Oh, attend to the latter part of the verse to which I have alluded, as occuring in the same chapter with the text: "Whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe." Observe how our Lord illustrates this (Luke xviii.): "There is no man," saith he, "that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom

of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting." Yes; the kingdom of God,—even righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,—set up and flourishing in his heart here, shall be a most ample amends for worldly scorn or loss: besides that godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come. To those who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these things shall be added: "for your heavenly Father," saith our Lord, "knoweth that ye have need of all these things." When you begin once to taste that the Lord is gracious, how light will you make of those reproaches and inconveniences you now dread so much! Nay, you will rejoice, as you are bid to rejoice, to have all manner of evil spoken against you, falsely, for the Lord's sake: "rejoice and leap for joy; for great is your reward in heaven."

I would now, in conclusion, exhort you no longer to harden your necks against repeated warning, to your sudden and remediless destruction; but to repent, and believe in Jesus Christ, under the encouraging assurance, that "he that putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe."

You who have slighted the calls of Divine grace all your days hitherto, who have lived in open sin and wickedness, come now: for God calls you, saying, As yet there is room.

All things are ready: come to the marriage of his Son, who by himself has done what is quite sufficient to purge all your sins. Come, and put your trust in him; confessing your unworthiness, and willing that he should have all the glory of saving your souls; and he will place you on a sure foundation; he will give you true rest and peace of conscience: he will take away the heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh; and put his own Spirit in you, causing you to walk in God's statutes, and to keep his judgments, and to do them. Hearken: this is his complaint, "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life." As much as to say, It is not that my Father and I are unwilling to come to you and make our abode with you; it is not that you have sinned past the extent of the Divine mercy: no; for, where sin hath abounded, grace hath much more abounded. It is not that your sins are of so particular a sort that my blood cannot wash them away; for that blood is sufficient to cleanse from all sin. It is not, that, because you once knew the right road, and then forsook it, therefore there is no mercy. No such language in God's word: for it is written, I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely. But thus speaks the Saviour; Your ruin, if you be ruined (mark it, O men! O women! every one of you), will be owing to this, that ye will not come to me that ye might have life. If your lives be decent and regular, you are building

on that ground for acceptance, and cannot bear to think of coming to Christ for all your salvation. If your lives be scandalous and irregular, then, though you have been often reproved, you harden your neck against his call; you will not trust him, you will not use him as a Saviour; you are not willing he should save you, and make you new creatures; for his is a holy salvation. What a lamentation this! Oh, when he shall come to judgment, what horror to think, This Saviour would once have saved me, if I would have suffered him, and obeyed his call, "My son, give me thine heart," but I would not: I loved my sins too well, to suffer Him by his grace to divorce me from them. Now the worm gnaws me that will not die, the fire burns me that will not be quenched!

Once more, then, I call unto you in all solemnity: O men and brethren, to you is the word of this salvation sent. Will you be saved? come to Jesus. Multiply difficulties against your conversion as you please; this one thing, coming to Jesus Christ, whom the Father has given to save the world, answers all difficulties. Come this day and seek his face, determined to make Christ all your hope, comfort, and salvation, and you shall be safe. Yes, your guilty consciences shall know peace; your burdened hearts shall know joy; your weary feet shall be guided into the way of peace; Satan shall be bruised under your feet; you shall

cease to love sin, you shall love God and your neighbour, and be happy for ever. Will you come to Christ, or will you not? On the one side is heaven; on the other, hell!—O that you would attend to this plain discourse to good purpose, and be warned to flee from the wrath to come, and believe in Christ to the saving of your souls!

SERMON II.

A WISE ESTIMATE OF TIME A HEAVEN-TAUGHT LESSON.

PSALM XC. 12.

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

THIS is a prayer the propriety of which none will dispute, who at all reflect on the brevity of human life, the uncertainty of all its enjoyments, and the certainty of death, and after death the judgment. May it please the Lord to fulfil the petition of it upon the hearts and consciences of all here present at this time! May we be disposed to sober thought and composed reflection. May we so look through present objects, as to represent to ourselves those awful scenes of a death-bed and a judgment as real and present before us; and, under the influence of these considerations, may we form a right estimate of ourselves and our real state; and so number those few days we have yet to live, as to view them just passing away, and apply our hearts unto heavenly wisdom.

I would willingly bring the great subjects of the Gospel to our view under these awful circumstances. If Gospel faith and holiness

be derided, it is because perhaps the scorners are in full health and vigour of body: because death seems to them as it were at a prodigious distance, therefore these subjects are viewed superficially, and gain not their approbation, for they are not allowed a fair examination of their necessity and importance.

In a congregation of this magnitude, I have several different sorts of persons to address on the subject, and I could wish we all considered the things I have to speak of with a full view of death near at hand. If death be kept out of sight, they cannot be weighed as they deserve. But let each man remember that he is himself near death, and he will find that to be reasonable and just which in his careless state he deems to be whimsical and absurd.

The days must be numbered as short, and the man should stand as on the brink of a precipice, ready to take a long leap into the world unseen: then there is hope his very heart may be struck, and the true wisdom, the care of the soul, may deeply engage his understanding and affections. But if the days be numbered as long; if the young man looks forward to many delightful years of worldly pleasure as certain, and the old man thinks that at least he may reckon upon another year or two of life, Satan's charm then succeeds; the heart is at his service: he will allow indeed the lips of his vassal to utter some few serious expressions; but the affections shall remain the cap-

tives of depraved sense and a vitiated imagination.

Ye gay and thoughtless ones of either sex, ye whose very life is in pleasure and dissipation, what think you of a death-bed—the passing-bell—the coffin—and the grave? Have I startled you? Do your hearts beat with fear and terror? Does the colour forsake your cheeks? and are you at this moment so taken up with the frightful images which the words I uttered suggested to you, that you are obliged to be grave a moment whether you will or not? O may the impression prove not the transient sensation of the animal spirits, but the abiding and salutary conviction of the heart, productive of a heaven-born repentance! Consider, fellow-creatures: these scenes would not be so terrible to you, did conscience bring in a verdict in your favour. Nay, were your hearts as they should be,—reconciled to the God who made you, and loving him above all things,—the things which I have mentioned would convey to you no terrible ideas; they would rather afford pleasure to you: for what dutiful child, who has for years been absent from his tender parent, does not long to return home to his kind embraces? So long the real children of God to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Surely, then, if you cannot bear to think of death, you cannot be the loving children of God. Good children have a pleasure in seeing their parent. You rather flee his presence, and

would fain avoid him as an enemy. Like Adam fallen, you would gladly hide yourselves from the thought of God's approach, in the garden of sensual delights: for what means your flight from the thought of death, but that you hate to meet God as a Judge?

Or will you say, your fear of death arises from your unwillingness to part with the joys of sense, and your agreeable connections here? Even this way your heart condemns you; for what connections would be so agreeable as those with God and just men made perfect, were God indeed your Father, and were you fitly disposed for communion with him and his saints? You love father and mother, or the world, and the things of the world, more than Jesus Christ; and therefore you cannot, as he says, be his disciples. I would hope some of you are struck with serious concern; that some, perhaps, who never did it heartily before, are praying, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." Is it so? Then indeed there is hope. A Saviour, mighty in power and gracious in pity, stretches out his arms to receive you. Why will you resist his calls? Here is his blood to purge you from sin, his love to melt you, his Spirit to sanctify you, his grace to renew your fallen nature, and implant new affections in you. Only desire him, look to him, flee to him for refuge; He is the only hope of sinners; receive him with your hearts as your Saviour;

throw yourselves into his arms to do with you as he will, as poor, ruined, helpless souls; and he will make you meet for himself, and, disarming death of his sting, convert him into a friend.

But are you inclined to defer this most important business of ensuring reconciliation for some time, desirous of still enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season? Look forward, then, to death. You may possess the means of gratification only some few years—perhaps not a day. Death may be just at hand. Suppose it were so. Could you then reflect with pleasure on your mirth and jollity, your gaiety and revelling? Could you then say these things were at all serviceable to comfort you on your bed in your sickness? Will it then be a satisfaction to say, I have ever been a lover of pleasure more than of God? Or if your character has been that of a lover of money, rather than a lover of pleasure, will it be then a pleasing reflection to you to think, I spent much more thought on getting gain, than on the concerns of my soul? Consider how little will it then avail you to have been successful in business, when you are going "poor and naked" to appear in the world of spirits, eternally dissolved from all your connections with this. Think of this, O ye whose hearts are so taken up with the things of this life, that you never find time to ask yourselves the question in good earnest, Am I walking in the

way to heaven or not? Stop short in your frantic career, and be persuaded to set apart some portion of time each day to meditate on this point. Let it take possession of your thoughts for some time together; and weigh it with all the earnestness that becomes men who stand on the brink of a precipice, and who must be heirs either of eternal happiness or eternal misery!

The view of death as near at hand would be a means to rectify our judgments and properly impress our affections in many respects. What is the reason that the man who has had a loss in trade, or a disappointment in his worldly expectations, frets immoderately, and can take no comfort? Why does poverty so depress the spirits of some, that they choose strangling rather than life, and murmur against the Lord? Why does affliction make men mad with grief, and overwhelm them with despair? Why, again, are others so elevated with a little accession of wealth, so joyful at what they call a lucky hit, and seemingly so happy when their affairs succeed to their expectations? I am not for making men to be without passions; but why are these passions so prodigiously excited by such little events as these, whose consequences are so unimportant, and which, after a few years at most, will cease to be of any consequence to them at all; and why are these same passions so dull and unconcerned at future invisible things? If any thing ought

to raise the passions, it should be the apprehension of a time, at no great distance hence, when I must certainly put off this mortality, and enter into a new world, and a new society; where my portion must be, either to live in the favour and enjoyment of God with angels and just men made perfect, in inconceivable bliss for ever; or to perish for ever, in the most exquisite misery, in the society of devils. How important are these scenes! how adapted in their nature to excite the passions! and yet those very persons, who can be lifted up to the skies with the prospect of the gain of some acres of land or pieces of money, or be depressed to the lowest melancholy with a view of the loss of these trifles—those very persons seem to forget they have passions, and to be without feeling, when they hear or read of death and judgment, heaven or hell. They will say, It is true indeed we ought to prepare for death; and fetch a sigh perhaps, or shake the head; and then in a few moments set their passions at riot upon this world again, and quite forget that there is another.

I wish some who hear me this day may not prove by their conduct on this very occasion that what I say is too true. But I ask still, How happens it that men's passions should be so much alarmed and agitated with little and momentary considerations, and so insensible under the view of the most important ones? The truth is, they hide death, and the world

unseen, from their thoughts. Their bare belief of the existence of a future state is of no avail, since they look upon death, the gate that leads to it, as something that is at a vast distance from them: it appears like some child of the imagination, some ideal thing, some shadowy event. Hence it is that men cannot be proper judges of heavenly things, and of the great doctrines of the Gospel, while they are concerned only for this world. When, then, you undertake to judge of the truth of doctrines and the concerns of eternity, remember to suppose yourself as a mortal really interested in them. Then there may be hope you will see the truth, and be able to distinguish what is right from wrong. But if your heart be only set on this world; if your desires pant not for the happiness of another; if neither your hopes nor fears be agitated with the view of death and judgment; a cloud will hang over your understanding, and the doctrines of the new birth, assurance of faith, and justification only by the merits of Christ, will appear to you to be irrational, absurd, and fanatical. There are other doctrines—the doctrines of *sincere* obedience, and the hope that *it* gives of bliss, and the *dignity* of human nature—that will appear to you more worthy of your regard. I would, however, appeal to the consciences of those who are fond of these doctrines, whether they are not quite cold and careless of death and judgment, when they think of them. Mark this, I beseech you: for

if the doctrines you espouse will not stand the test of that deep consideration and hearty application which should result from the view of a death-bed, depend on it they are not worth having. What need, then, to pray, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom!" for without such a concern for the soul as the prospect of mortality should inspire, the heart will neither understand nor relish Divine truths.

If we would ask still further, how it happens that men's passions move so slow under the view of death, I answer, This proceeds from the Fall. Certainly man is not right in his affections by nature, or his passions of hope and fear would not be so exercised with the view of these transient, worldly things; they would be all alive for eternity. But it is not so: men can hear and speak of death and the next world without so much as a thought of concern what their own portion is to be.

Let us, then, bring to this test of death and judgment the different sorts of doctrine I mentioned. May what has been said be a means of solemnizing our affections, and fitting us for composed reflection on the awful, endless futurity before us! May we remember we must die; may we feel ourselves as it were at the brink of death; and may every heart be suitably affected with the view! If any of us be not thus affected, we shall blunder, and mistake what is scripturally rational for enthusiastic,

and what is the height of madness and folly for sound reason and solid argument. O may the God of the spirits of all flesh exert his sovereign power in thus disposing our hearts, and placing death as a thing evidently near and before our eyes! Then we shall be sober-minded, and may be made capable of judging aright concerning the doctrines of salvation. I would willingly hope some of us are thus soberly and seriously disposed; and cheered with this hope, I proceed to examine the use and influence of the different sorts of doctrines above hinted at.

Let, then, each one imagine himself on a death-bed, ready to take his last farewell of the objects of sense—the physician has given up the man—he looks to his dearest friends: they can sympathise with him, they cannot relieve him—he is full of pain and anguish: his relations can pity, they cannot console him—bring before him his bags of money; tell him of his lands and houses, his character and connections, his good sense and mental abilities—you grieve him to the soul, if you suppose these things are to administer any support to him. 'What are they all to me,' if he can think soberly, he may say, 'who am going to leave them all, and to appear before God to be judged by him!' He is just going to enter into the world of spirits, he is just closing his eyes on all that he holds dear on earth, he is just going to travel an untried road, to ex-

perience scenes utterly unknown to his senses, —scenes that will be important and durable for ever. Surely it must be some extraordinary support that must enable a man in these circumstances to rejoice and triumph. CHRISTIANITY says, Christ came to deliver men from the fear of death, that he has overcome him that had the power of death. The question then is, What is the way which the Gospel offers, whereby the man may rest his soul in peace in this alarming hour, and, what is more, may find after death that the peace was well-founded? Many, while in health and bodily vigour, maintain that the scheme of relief and safety is this; The man must have *sincere* obedience; and that this, though imperfect, together with the merits of Christ, will save him. Try we, then, the force of this doctrine now in the hour of death. I suppose the man sensible of his approaching dissolution, and of the important interests of futurity. Now is the time to apply the comfort of this doctrine to himself. How shall he know whether he has paid this sincere obedience? Is there a man in the world, as an excellent divine of our Church asks, that knows how to define what this sincere obedience is? no. Has any man stated accurately how far a man may go in obedience, and where he may with safety stop short of perfection? no. If it means something short of perfection, knows any man how much short will suffice? no. Can any

man tell what parts of the Divine law he may be allowed to neglect, and what parts he must observe? no. On the contrary, "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." There is no finding, then, what this sincere obedience is this way. If, then, it consist in obeying all God's laws equally, but all only in a certain degree, knows any man what that degree is? no. Bring the Bible to the man. See if you can find a passage that can resolve his doubts. He is looking back into his past life, and would hope he has performed this sincere obedience, but he cannot tell how to compare his life with the Bible, because he knows not what the rule is. The Bible helps him not in this way at all; for it does not say, Let three-quarters of bitterness and wrath and anger be put away from you, but "Let *all* bitterness be put away from you, with *all* malice;" and so of the rest. Thus does death, and that soul-concern which death should inspire, break the charm of this deceitful doctrine of sincere obedience. It is a pretty expression, with no determinate ideas affixed to it. It may calm the mind of the careless, and harden the insensible; but when you would apply it, and seriously make use of it, it can do no good; because no man knows what it is; and not knowing, how can he have a well-founded hope in death, from that of which he is ignorant? But look the Bible through for this poor man from end to end, and you can-

not find that this is the condition of salvation. You never find it said, Men will be saved if they do their *best*, if their obedience be *sincere*, though not perfect. No such phrase, no such idea, to be found in that book, which says, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." What horror and despair, at least what fear and uncertainty, must ensue to the man who is going into eternity on this sandy foundation!—Does he still hope to be saved? Perhaps he does, only he thinks it presumptuous to expect assurance beforehand! Admit, then, he does hope—though I have shewn his hope to be a false and ruinous one—yet he thinks it his duty not to be sure. He must doubt then: let him then view himself just departing, uncertain whether he is not going to dwell with devils for ever; and can he be delivered from that fear of death which fills the soul with torment? Surely, if he think deeply at all, he must be alarmed at such a dreadful peradventure.—The sum, then, of what has been shewn hitherto is, that the doctrine of sincere obedience as the condition of salvation, and of uncertain hope of that salvation, may suit the state of a careless formalist, may give him ease who thinks not with earnestness for his soul; but apply them to him who feels the value of his soul, and who is going to surrender it to the God who gave it, and they cannot give him peace in death: and if they will not

stand this test, they ought not to give him peace in his life-time.

But the man, also, while in health maintained the *dignity* of human nature, and was positive that his will and other faculties were able to serve God *aright*, though with imperfection; and therefore derided the doctrine of the new birth, because that supposes man to need new principles wherewith to serve God to be implanted in him in this life, for that his natural principles are incapable of this. He is now on his death-bed, and the might of this self-confidence is going to be tried. Can he trust to it without flinching? Read to him our Lord's sentence, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." He knows he despised this; never experienced in his life any such change of heart. He always thought he had a good heart. Dare he think then he shall see the kingdom of God, in express contradiction to his word? No, brethren. Death, thus considered, shews the vanity of all these doctrines; proves their unscriptural and ruinous nature; and if the man depart out of life thus, he dies unreconciled to God, with no true peace, no scriptural hope—the devils will tell what is done on the other side the wall with triumph!

It remains, then, that we look out for other supports in death, and try the power of the real doctrines of the Gospel. May we so number our days, as to apply our hearts to

real wisdom! In the midst of life we are in death; and therefore should each one even now put himself in the place of the dying man, and ask, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul answers, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved....He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." There is a righteousness perfect and sure; he that believes on Jesus has it. While he remained, indeed, careless of death and judgment, he was content with the notion of being saved by doing his best; but when he began to apply the doctrine in real soul-concern, 'How do these matters stand with me?' he found no place whereon to rest his foot. 'What if this be not enough? what if I am not yet good enough?' was his constant suspicion. He laboured indeed to become better, but in his own apprehensions he grew worse and worse; the farther he went, the more holy and extensive he found the law; and by experience he was so far from ever being able to gain sincere obedience, that he had not a grain of sincerity in his composition. He found he was, through the Fall, corrupt and abominable altogether. In this situation, gladly did he hear that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness, to every one that believeth;" and that "To him that worketh, is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt; but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the

ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness." Gladly did he learn, under God, to believe this record for himself, and to find through his Surety a righteousness perfect and spotless. He now looks on death as a friend, and looks forward to God as his Father. He knows, with Paul, that "if this earthly tabernacle be dissolved, he has a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." I say, he *knows*—nothing less than this assured knowledge can content a soul awakened like his.

And, now, how fitted is this doctrine to answer the end of the Gospel in delivering men from fear of death! He says, with Paul, "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Here is a rational foundation for joy and triumph in death. And why should he not be sure? God is faithful in his record, and there he trusts. He knows, indeed, that no man but he who is holy, and renewed in his mind, or born again, can enter into heaven. He who never felt in his soul such a work as this, may well be uneasy in death. But this man has felt it; and his hope maketh him not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost. He dies, then, in peace, and is received to glory.

SERMON III.

THE WICKED SALTED BY FIRE, THE RIGHTEOUS BY GRACE.

MARK ix. 49.

For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.

THE true meaning of this passage can scarce be ascertained without referring to the preceding words. Our Saviour was shewing the absolute necessity of crucifying the affections and lusts. Every man, who sets out for the kingdom of heaven, will find something or other which offends him; some favourite passion or idol, which directly stands in his way, and forbids his progress. Conscience points out the necessity of parting with it. Strong inclination says, Spare it, spare it; and specious reasonings are sought out to vindicate the indulgence. But, if it be like a hand, a foot, or an eye, it must be cut off, it must be plucked out. Christ brings the matter into a very close compass, and reduces us to a dilemma: either part with it, or go into hell-fire. Whether is the better way? Mankind are slow to believe this. If it be possible to make his meaning appear

different, they will attempt it. Christ knows this; and therefore, in several verses before the text, he repeats (we may suppose very probably for this very reason) the same thought several times, to the end that no man, unwilling to part with his sins, may flatter himself with hope of salvation. And, to cut off all hope of being saved in the next life, he repeats again and again, that the worm shall never die, and the fire shall never be quenched. Opinions, which I may justly call damnable ones, against the eternity of hell, he knew would be broached by men who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. And could sinful men verily believe that this would be the case; that, even after many years' punishment in hell, they might still be delivered from torment, the consequence would doubtless be this, that they would venture with still more greediness to sin. And I seriously apprehend, that if such sentiments prevailed, much, very much as wickedness now abounds, it would extend itself still more, and men would know no restraints in sinning. Indeed, experience shews that this is the case. Look at the lives of those who treat with contempt the awful threatenings of God against sinners, and talk of the mercy of God as too great to send any sinner into a place of eternal torment. Such men, having lost all idea of the Divine justice and purity, and scorning the real mercy of God, which the Gospel of Christ exhibits through his atoning blood, live in sin

unchecked and unrestrained. And it is observable, that sensual and unclean lusts particularly domineer over such men; and these very charitable persons are the pests and plague of their fellow-creatures, filling towns and families with all the evils necessarily attendant on lasciviousness. It is not only, therefore, necessary for the ideas of the next life, but also for the benefit of society in this, that the real Scripture truth on this subject be attended to seriously by men. And when men of wicked and impure lives, and unconverted persons in general, are once made sensible of these things, and feel the truth of our Saviour's words, and are awakened in good earnest to flee from the wrath to come, then it is proper that the comforts and motives and encouragements and promises of the Gospel should be laid before them, that they may be quickened, and drawn effectually to God.

The fire spoken of in the text is the fire of hell, which our Lord has repeatedly brought into view in the foregoing verses. And here is an allusion to the law of Moses, the ideas of which are quite familiar in the New Testament. Every sacrifice offered to the Lord by fire was to be salted with salt, in order to be acceptable to God. The quality of salt, in preserving meat and keeping it from putrefaction, is well known; and therefore, in this shadowy dispensation the instruction is this, that whatever is offered to God should be clean and pure.

This is sufficient for the explanation of the latter clause of the text, "every sacrifice shall be salted with salt." All really converted and purified persons,—men who through grace have really mortified the old man with his lusts, and cut off the hand and foot, and plucked out the eye,—all these are as so many sacrifices salted with salt. The savour and the purity—(both these qualities of salt are obviously alluded to)—the savour and the purity of real sacrifices, acceptable to God, are what our Lord here means; and such persons, having now their whole hearts given up to God, shall serve and enjoy their God for ever; and by the salt of grace which is in them, shall be preserved from the destruction which will seize other men. It is not so with the wicked. Those who live and die with lusts unmortified and indulged, every one of these (and this is the former clause of the text) "shall be salted with fire." They would not receive the salt of Divine grace, to purify them and fit them as sacrifices acceptable to God: they shall therefore be salted in another manner, dreadful beyond thought; they shall be salted with hell-fire. This shall preserve their being for ever—in this respect it has the quality of salt, which is of a preserving nature—but, while it preserves their being, it consumes them body and soul, and will do so for ever. This I take to be the true meaning of the former part of the text, "For every one shall be salted with fire;" and this is perfectly agreeable to

the former verse, "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

To join, then, the two clauses which have been thus separately explained, this is in brief what our Saviour declares,—Every man who leaves the world with his sins upon him, shall be seized by the fire of hell; which shall have one property of salt, to keep him from being reduced to nothing, and at the same time shall always torment him. On the other hand, every one who freely gives up himself as a sacrifice acceptable to God in sincerity and purity, shall be preserved by the salt of Divine grace for ever, in true health and perfection of bliss, and in the unspeakable enjoyment of God.—I say no more on the meaning of the text. The connection and order of things in the whole passage, joined to the well-known properties of salt, and the ideas of the ceremonial law of Moses, shew that this is what our Lord means. To apply it to our consciences must now be our business.

And, brethren, do any of us feel disgusted at the subject? But are not the words of Christ to be attended to? Has he so repeatedly in the latter part of this chapter shewn us these things, and will men pretend to be more charitable than he to souls? Whether does charity consist in warning men, think you, of their danger, or in flattering men in their sins? The former is the charity of Christ; the latter, the charity of Satan. Know, ye who will not bear

the full and strong consideration of this subject, that it is your love of sin, and your perfect unwillingness to part with it, which causes this disgust: and shall any man pretend that it is more prudent and wise to keep these thoughts out of view, and to deal with men only in gentle and more smooth considerations? I believe that men are not to be guided into the way of life, unless brought to the fear of the Lord, and alarmed to flee from the wrath to come. And, O drunkard, whoremonger, and careless sinner in general, how is it to be expected that thou shouldst be converted, if thou never be alarmed? Gentle and kind things, exceedingly so, will be shewn to thee by the charity of God, if ever thou be turned to God by Christ. But thou art not yet fit for this. Thy pride and presumption and corruption need the rebuke of this subject. Wert thou the greatest personage in the world, and such a character as thou art, thus must thou be treated. And I have seen so much of the success of these representations, through the grace of God in Christ, and the emptiness of other ways, that I feel both Christian zeal and Christian charity to unite in calling on me to press you with our Saviour's ideas; to apply them to your souls; to beseech you, sinners, to suffer them to come with weight on your minds. If you would be happy, disappoint Satan, and escape the hell which remains for the wicked, learn to feel your real danger of it now. But

a few distinct considerations must be laid before you.

1. If you conceive eternal punishment as very dreadful, learn hence that most wholesome of all lessons, next to the knowledge of Jesus Christ the Redeemer,—I mean, the *evil of sin.* There is nothing which our fallen nature is slower to learn, or less apt to be affected with. It is one of the strongest evidences and fruits of the Fall itself, that men do not easily see sin to be any great evil. There is a hardness of heart, an indifference and carelessness of spirit concerning God and his service, an excessive blindness of mind, which we have contracted by the loss of the Divine image, and by the deep and strong influence which Satan hath gained in our hearts in consequence of our fallen state. Still we love ourselves, and are affected much at the idea of suffering. Hence the prejudice of men's minds against our Saviour's doctrine in the text. It will be so, where their thoughts of sin are so slight, and bear no proportion to the keenness with which they reflect on suffering. Perhaps our ideas may be a little assisted by considering how differently those beings are affected who never sinned at all, in whom the love of God has ever prevailed without the least stain,—I mean, the happy angels, who always preserved their first estate. With them, to love God supremely is happiness itself, and it must appear the most monstrous thing in the world for a

creature to disobey or rebel against his Maker and infinite Benefactor. When this was realized at length, and a number of their own body by transgression fell, do we suppose that they ever felt a murmuring thought against the justice of God in condemning their fellow-angels to hell, and leaving them under sentence of eternal damnation? Far from it: they have such a sense of the Divine majesty and excellency, and are so taken up with love and admiration and gratitude to the Being of all beings, that, though doubtless perfectly free from all malice or ill-will toward the worst of their fellow-creatures, which is more than can be said for those who set up pleas of humanity against Divine justice, they yet reverence the equity of the Divine proceedings, and say from the heart, "Righteous art thou, O Lord, and true are thy judgments." And when another order of beings—even we men—were also drawn into sin and fell from God, the holy angels would doubtless have the same sentiments respecting us also: and had not Divine grace and mercy interposed, by the great work of redemption, they would naturally have had no more thought of the possibility of our recovery, than that of their fellow-angels. And the discovery of the way of this redemption by Christ affects them with wonder: it is called "the manifold wisdom of God, made known by the church to the principalities and powers in heavenly places;" and we are told, these things "the angels desire

to look into." That sin should be forgiven, and sinners restored, appears to them marvellous; the effect of wisdom, love, and grace beyond what they could have conceived. All this is because they know sin to be so very horrible a thing: and that far different conceptions, both of the punishment of sin and of redemption by the blood of Jesus, are formed by sinful men, is because they look on sin as a small matter. It seems to you, unconverted sinners, no such great matter for God to pardon it; nor do you see any beauty in the contrivance of sending his well-beloved Son to atone for it. 'Why could not he easily forgive his poor weak creatures of himself, without so much ado?' These are the inmost thoughts of your minds; and they tend to throw contempt on the whole plan of the Gospel, and make it evident that the things of God, which carry the strongest impressions of his wisdom, are with you mere foolishness. While such thoughts prevail in you, you may wear the Christian name, but you have the hearts of infidels, and do not understand, nor believe, nor love the Christian religion itself. So far as good morality and external reformation go, you can approve of what is good, because you see the beauty of good order, and may be friends to human society; but this is not at all to see the evil of sin as fighting against God himself. And how it comes to pass that you do not perceive the evil of sin against him, you

may see by a comparison. Observe the manners and the spirit of a number of hardened felons in a gaol. Are they sensible of the evil of their conduct? Do they approve of the severity of the laws which condemn them? Are not they apt to think their punishment very hard, their faults not so very shocking? Yet you can see that they are hardened by the power of sinful prejudices and habits, and can condemn their stupidity. Just so is it with sinners in general, sentenced to damnation by the God of justice. They see not nor approve of the holy wrath of God; their self-love, and their love of sin, blind and harden them: but it is not so with holy angels. When, then, you think of being salted with the fire of hell, according to the very awful idea of the text, think of the sinfulness of sin: and if you cannot feel it, examine your lives and ways, and think of your numberless transgressions, with all their aggravations: and if still your hearts remain hard, think how hard they must be, how deformed you must appear in the eyes of holy angels—just as hardened felons do in the eyes of men of worthy character in society—and bewail your hardness of heart; but at the same time know that God is just, and will execute his threatenings, and will not call back his word; and that your unreasonable hardness of heart will no more free you from hell, than the obduracy of felons will free them from a disgraceful

death. And learn to know that there are depths of evil in sin, which exceed all our thoughts. But withal pray for humbling grace from above, that God may "give you repentance, to the acknowledging of the truth, and that you may recover yourselves out of the snare of the devil, who are now taken captive by him at his will."

2. And I beseech you, further, to search and try your ways, and pray and labour to get such a thorough insight into yourselves, that you may properly come into a state of just alarm and awakening of conscience. While men can cavil, and excuse, and call their sins weaknesses, instead of real crimes of enmity against God, they cannot repent, nor can they possibly make any right use of the atoning blood of Christ. It is evident that numbers, who live in known sin, are in this state continually. They hope for mercy, not on account of any views they have of the atoning blood of Christ, or any knowledge at all of the doctrines of the Gospel, but because they do not see their sins to be heinous. Men may be safely classed into two ranks by this single mark,—the sense of sin, is it faint, or is it strong? is there little evil in it, or is there much? All the real doctrines of the Gospel point out that sin is an exceedingly great evil; all the corruptions of Christianity say that sin is a trifle. Therefore, if we would learn true repentance, we must stick fast by real New-Testament principles, because it is under their in-

fluence only that men come to see the truth of their own case. And I would to God that many, who have a sort of approbation of the Gospel, could be seen to have consciences truly alarmed and awakened! I have known sinners made truly sensible of their lost condition—not only grossly wicked persons, but even those whose moral characters were without stain—feeling themselves undone, and seeking for rest in Christ; nor could they be satisfied till they knew what rest in Christ meant in their own experience. And it is no more than what is agreeable to the truth of things: if sin deserves to be salted with fire and preserved for eternal flames, it may be expected that men, coming to know this, should be awakened and alarmed in conscience, and cry out of the depths, "Lord, hear my voice!" But now persons can speculate at their ease on these awful subjects, without feeling and without any conversion. But I have seen the happiest effects to flow from the just awakenings of the conscience. God leaves not such to perish: he despises not the broken and contrite spirits. He heals, and comforts, and sanctifies them. —O that souls were brought more to a just feeling of sin, and that we might see more of what I have known among us, even sinners asking earnestly what they might do to be saved! The very best consequences would follow. Let all who love Christ, and have charity for souls, pray for this: and let parents who have tasted

of the grace of God be earnest in soliciting the Throne of Grace that their children may not go through life with a cold respectfulness for the Gospel on account of their parents, but may feel those pangs of conscience which may stir them up of necessity to seek salvation by Christ for themselves.

And having thus endeavoured to impress on your minds a sense of the evil of sin, from the dreadfulness of the Divine punishment, and from the agonies of a justly awakened conscience, let me,

3dly, Beseech you, if nothing else will overcome the hardness of your hearts, to turn the eyes of your minds to the most affecting object that ever was exhibited to mankind. Behold the sufferings of Christ! his agony, unknown in the depth of it; and his distress, great beyond measure: and it was for thy sin, O unfeeling sinner! Thou hast wallowed in uncleanness, lasciviousness, and drunkenness; and he suffers thirst for thee, and his last gasp is embittered with vinegar. Thou hast lived in sloth and indulgence; and he undergoes for thee the racking torture of the cross. Thou hast forsaken God for the world, and hast sold thy spirit for filthy lucre; and he for thee dies poor and forsaken by all mankind. Thou hast lived in profane jollity and mirth; and he weeps, complains, and is sorrowful even to death, on thy account. In fine, like a lost sheep hast thou gone astray, and the Lord hath laid on

him thine iniquity. And if all this will not move thee to part with thy sins and turn to God, is it not fitting that thou shouldst be salted with fire at last, never to be consumed, and yet to be always consuming? Those lusts and idols which thou wilt not part with, will justly bring thee thither shortly, if thou repent not. Shall sinful men still indulge their vices, and escape after all, while the Son of God suffers for them the loss of all things? This consideration also shews the evil of sin exceedingly; it should move thee to repent and believe the Gospel.

4. I add one consideration more, and I have done with thee at this time. The more dreadful sin is in all these lights, the more reason hast thou to be thankful to God for Christ, and the more precious in thine eyes should be his salvation. God would have done us no wrong though he had left us to perish with the fallen angels, for whom no sacrifice was offered. How then, sinner, shalt thou escape, if thou neglect so great salvation? Thou art a corrupted creature, abominable in the eyes of a holy God: receive then the salt of Divine grace, to make thee a sacrifice acceptable to him. Else, if all this kindness in the unspeakable gift of the Son of God be lost upon thee, thou must be salted with fire. And now, count the cost, and make thy choice. Wilt thou still follow thy sins, and prefer the gratification of thy lusts before Christ Jesus? Is the pleasure

of eternal communion with him, who spared not himself, but offered himself a sacrifice for thy sins, to be thrown away for the sake of the short-lived pleasures of time and sense? How wilt thou endure everlasting burnings? Now thou refreshest thyself with sordid indulgences; but if thou trifle a little longer, thou must for ever be deprived of them, and have to reflect, that for them thou hast gained the worm that dieth not, and the fire that never shall be quenched. Awake! awake to consideration! and repent, and believe the Gospel, that thou mayest be preserved by the salt of grace in everlasting health and security. And bear, and believe and love, and wrestle against sin a little longer, believers: incorruptible joy and bliss await you.

SERMON IV.

THE UNSAVOURY CHRISTIAN ADMONISHED.

MARK ix. 50.

Salt is good; but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.

OUR Lord, as we have seen in the discourse on the words preceding the text, has been shewing the absolute impossibility of entering into the kingdom of heaven without mortifying the most darling sins and vices, though they be like an eye, a hand, or a foot. And it should be repeated in this age, for the conviction of presumptuous sinners, as Christ repeats it,—the loss is not temporal, but eternal; the worm shall not die, nor the fire be quenched. Whoever will not be salted with grace, to make him well-pleasing and agreeable to God in his dispositions and tempers, must be salted with hell-fire,—preserved in his being for punishment without end. We have seen these awful things; and I have pressed them on the conscience of careless and wicked men as I could. I pray God that they may be awakened to repentance, and to flee in good earnest from

the wrath to come. One verse more is added, and a farther allusion is made to the properties of salt, which will give me occasion to address the consciences of persons of another class; of those who do profess to love Divine things, and to regard the doctrines of Christ.

"Salt is good."—It is an excellent thing indeed, if you have the salt of Divine grace in your souls, diffused through all your temper, spirit, walk, and conversation. It will put life into all you do, and render even the most common and trifling actions well-pleasing, acceptable sacrifices to God. But if the salt have lost its saltness—if the savour of grace be gone, and nothing appear to remain but the form of religion—you are most unprofitable persons: your savour seems impossible to be recovered: nothing you do can make up the want of inward life Divine in your souls. Therefore "have salt"—that is, keep salt—in your souls; cherish and hold fast Divine grace in your hearts; and keep up peace and love one with another, in which the exercise of Divine grace very essentially consists.

This is the meaning of the text. There are two properties of salt here considered, which throw light on the subject.

The first is, the insipid and worthless condition of salt which has lost its savour. Our Lord's ideas were fetched from common life; and spiritual things were taught under the allusions to things well known by the men of

his generation. I do not know that we have an opportunity of seeing this property of salt; but Mr. Maundrel the traveller informs us, that he saw a rock of salt, and tasted of it as it had been exposed to the weather and had lost its savour: he found it perfectly insipid. I suppose the savour had been lost by the washing of the rains; and yet its form, colour, and figure were not in the least altered. A striking view this gives us of an hypocrite, who looks like a Christian, and has all the form of doctrine and profession of Christ, yet has nothing at all of that savour which is peculiarly Christian. What shall I call it? It is faith, hope, love, joy in Christ, gratitude for redemption, humility and brokenness of heart, tenderness of spirit, and sympathy with the members of Christ. It is, in short, a spiritual understanding and life, with all the proper exercises of them. Good things, indeed! but what if a man parts with all these, and contents himself with making one of Christ's people by profession? What shall season this man? Look at insipid salt; it is good for nothing. The lowest use that can be made of any thing is, that it may be fit for manure; but, says our Lord, in the close of the 14th of St. Luke, where the same subject is handled, "it is neither fit for the land nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out." And in the 5th of St. Matthew, in the Sermon on the Mount, he says, Christians are the salt of the earth; and he repeats

the same thing of the worthlessness of salt which had lost its savour: "it is good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men." I apprehend, in Judea men by their eyes might frequently observe what Mr. Maundrel tells us he once saw. And from this image the perfectly unprofitable condition of a vain professor is strikingly evident. How much does he look like a real saint, and yet how unlike altogether!

The second property of salt alluded to in the text, is its uniting nature, the adhesion of its particles: "Have peace one with another." Where the salt of grace is in possession of its genuine savour, men cleave to one another in love and peace. The want of this drives them asunder in bitterness and variance.

But the text is sufficiently plain. It consists of four parts. I shall say something of each in order, applying, as I see reason, all the way to ourselves.—O thou Saviour, whose grace alone, living and thriving in our hearts, can make us live to God by thee, can keep us comfortable in thy religion, and cause us to relish it, and to live in holy harmony with one another; oh! amidst all our infirmities and evils, be Thou with us, and prevent us from separating both from thee and one another. May we feel the savour of grace, diffuse it among one another in love, keep it with jealous care, and live for ever!

1. The first observation is, of the excellency of a principle of grace in the heart: "*Salt is good.*"—The sun shines not on an object in the world more precious than a savoury Christian, in whom there is the true relish of godliness. It easily shews itself distinct, in all the conduct and conversation, from the spirit of those in whom the salt has lost its savour. Two men may both profess the same things concerning Jesus Christ, yet how different is he who is alive from him who is dead! As the speech is one of the greatest instruments of man's conduct and walk, it will particularly distinguish the two characters. "Let your speech," says the Apostle, "be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." He in whom Christ dwells by faith, has given up himself to his God and Saviour, to be his without exception and without reserve, both in doing and suffering. He cannot use his tongue, then, to the purposes of slander and defamation, boasting and vain-glory. Tenderness of spirit, exact sincerity, fervent love, and undissembled humility, will guide his discourse. Mankind shall see that he loves God, loves his fellow-creatures, loves the truth as it is in Jesus, delights in the prosperity of his church; and is ready to bear, to forgive, to hope the best of all, where there is any room for hoping; and not to be weary in well-doing. Nor does he think that he merits any thing at the hand of God. He

has a treasure of grace to keep and preserve: he knows to whom he is obliged for it; and what care is needful to replenish it; and with all his care, and with all his love of God and goodness, he knows and feels so much each day of the workings of sin in his nature, and is so sensible how imperfect he is continually, and how stained with sin in his very best doings, that he refers himself wholly to the grace of Christ for his acceptance with God, from first to last. If you have eyes to discern the excellency of this character, you may observe this man to pant after more grace, more conformity to Christ; to be incapable of pleasure, except in the love of Christ; and you may see his heart dead to self, to pleasure, to honour, to money, to ambition, to any thing, except his Divine Saviour and the hope of glory. The prospect of heaven, the beauty of holiness in Christ's example, and the sense of redemption through his blood, you may see tincture all his actions A real lively Christian will in a very little time, in an easy, unforced manner, shew you what he is, and where his heart is, when he is not at all meaning to shew any thing of the kind, And however profane men may banter, their own consciences own his superiority. Where God has stamped his image, it strikes an awe on beholders. Holiness must extort commendation, even from the most unwilling. Were the world full of such characters, wars would cease between

nations, quarrels between neighbours, and distractions in families. How good is this salt! How much of evil in the world is prevented by it! This is the character which the Gospel exhibits; and where it is truly preached, God generally owns it with some success; and such characters may doubtless be seen among us, to the praise of the glory of Divine grace. Let such give praise to God, and walk thankfully, humbly, and cautiously. I beseech you take notice of such. Where you see men who profess to seek salvation and happiness only by Christ, and in the regeneration which the Scripture describes, living righteously, soberly, and godly, there you see men in whom is the Spirit of God: know that God is there; and learn their religion, and seek from him the same grace, if you would meet with them in heaven,

But, 2dly, "*if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith will ye season it?*"—We have, as in all ages is common, too many of these insipid ones. Their numbers grow as Christian profession becomes more common. Many take up the form of godliness, and strive to look like Christians, but for want of life they know not how to act as Christians; and the more they endeavour to appear what they are not, the more awkward the affectation appears. This is often the case with the children or dependants of real Christians, imitating those whom they revere, without having had their

experience. And many, who once were more warm in religion, gradually relapse into this state. If they talk of the Gospel, there is a deadness and flatness about them, more easily conceived than described, which shews they want a heart: they have the words of Gospel doctrine, but they do not know how to make the least use of any thing they know. Talk of different parties and denominations in religion, and outward considerations, they have something to say, and particularly in the censorious way. How wrong such and such persons are, they can tell, with malignant pleasure. But the fair and right side of things in religion they know not. Any thing spoken heartily of the pleasures of true religion, of the love of God, of the offices of Christ, of the power of the Holy Ghost, strikes them dumb. They assent, because they profess religion: they feel nothing. And their tempers, desires, and passions are worldly and unmortified as those of other men: their heart is not with God. And to see men by mere profession somewhat distinct from the world in some religious customs and practices, and in all the conduct just like the world, forms so disagreeable a piece of inconsistency, that it looks like the invention of Satan to disgrace the Gospel.

Yet, men of no profession at all, ye are inexcusable if ye suffer yourselves to despise godliness on account of these things. How can you say, They are all alike? This very

place shews you a sufficient number of instances of men walking in the fear and faith and love of God, that should convince you of the reality and excellency of true religion, and make you fear to be condemned at last for open profaneness, as well as those I am speaking of for empty profession.

Yet, empty professors, I wish you would follow the pattern of godly men in this point, —retire for private prayer frequently, as they do; and think what a poor thing it is to carry a form without feeling. Seek of God to know yourselves; how evil, how guilty, how corrupt. You may then be stirred up to seek for the true life of grace in experience. For think how miserably you live, bearing a name to which you have no real right, and, for want of true conversion, cast out as insipid salt, useless in the church of Christ. You have no heart to bear his cross, to deny self, to join with God's people in their joys or griefs; and you share not in any of their privileges or fruits. Consider these things alone, and bear your own private thoughts; for thus it may be that God may meet with you, and teach you saving lessons, which you avoid by being always in company or in the world, and living without any self-examination.

3. "*Have salt in yourselves.*"—This is an exhortation of our Lord, directing us to keep the salt of divine grace fresh and vigorous in our souls. To *have* salt in ourselves, is to *keep*

salt in ourselves. And that this is the true meaning of the direction, appears not only from the frequent use of the original word in this verse, but also from the nature of the thing. It is not in man to create grace in his soul: it is an unction entirely from above. The new creature, with his proper exercises and dispositions of stedfast faith, patient hope, and fervent charity, is altogether of Divine original and formation: so every one who attains it indeed will find by experience, because no one does attain it but those who renounce their own righteousness, are made thoroughly humble and contrite in spirit, and feel, with the Prophet, that "the way of man is not in himself," he being carnal, sold under sin. But those who have partaken of the salt indeed, have much to do in the way of duty, not only for the increase and growth of Divine life in their souls, but also to preserve what they have attained. And to them the precept, "Keep salt in yourselves," addresses itself. You now feel godly motions; you find a relish and ability to pray, to believe the Divine promises, to attend with profit and delight on the ordinances of grace, and have a hunger and thirst after righteousness: God in Christ appears near and present to you, and indulges you with communion with him in your souls: the love of Christ constrains you: his doctrines are precious in your eyes, his character most excellent; and you have the witness in yourselves

to the truth and solidity of his religion; you find it tinctures your whole man, and gives an agreeable savour to your whole deportment; and the hope beyond the grave is most comfortable. If so, keep all this—which is to be done,

(1st) *Positively*, by exercising the graces of the Gospel. Are faith, hope, and charity alive in your souls? Keep them so by daily exercise: believe steadily, hope cheerfully, and love perseveringly. Be not shaken in your minds by any discouragements. You are "made partakers of Christ, if you hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm to the end." The prize of eternal life is before you—it is the noblest object of ambition—keep it in view always. Here you are in a state of conflict, and must be so: but if faith, hope, and charity stand their ground, be exercised daily, and watched and cherished, you are invincible: you will soon finish your course with joy.

And (2dly) this salt is to be kept *negatively*, by abstaining from those things which have a tendency to hurt it. It is a precious thing; did Christians consider more how precious a little true grace is, they would be more tender over it; for many things in this bad world are against it; and the Spirit of God cannot be grieved and quenched in any degree, but the ill effects must follow. Keep, then, the salt of grace, by avoiding those things which make

against it. And they are evils of two opposite sorts,—evils of self-righteousness, and evils of open sin.—Evils of *self-righteousness* must thus be opposed. Keep Christ ever in view, as your all in all. By due attention to the word of God be well convinced of his complete sufficiency for you, as Prophet, Priest, and King: you need no other dependence. Having once received him, walk in him by faith. Fetch no help from human wisdom and refinements, for the peace of your souls. Never seek to establish yourselves in peace of conscience, nor to work yourselves into holy comfort and joy, by any other doctrine, or by the value of any work or duty whatever. Let Christ reign the Lord of peace. And trust him alone: yea, when conscience justly accuses you, still, amidst the lowest humiliation, you must fight the good fight of faith: "It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died....that rose again." Many, it is to be feared, have made shipwreck of all true religion for want of attending to this. Being under some concern for their souls, they have set themselves to reform some one particular part of their conduct. When this was done, they thought all was well, and thus they have healed themselves falsely without Christ, and have afterwards been left to pride and hardness of heart. With some, this sore evil has been effected by receiving the Lord's Supper in a spirit of self-righteousness: and others have

been tempted by being baptized a second time to expect peace of mind, and have that way obtained a false peace. This is not to keep the salt in ourselves, but to mar it, and introduce something of a very different nature in its room. Many fall into evils of this sort, and little know how severely Christ will one day reckon with them for contempt of his blood, which alone speaks peace. Those who honour him by the patient and cheerful dependence of all their souls, will find his medicine fails not. Those who trust physicians of no value, will find one day what it is to reject the remedy of God's own providing for men. Learn wisdom here, brethren, from above, and cleave to Christ; and take heed you be not imposed on by false appearances, which those are most liable to be who know the least of themselves.—And keep this precious salt, also, by avoiding *open sin*. I need not explain at large this; it is much more easily understood than the former. Worldly conformity, the pomps and vanity of this life, the gratification of lust, and the indulgence of malice and ill-will, together with a careless walk in general, and a light, curious, frothy spirit of conversation—all these things have a tendency to hurt the salt, and to rob you of the savour of godliness. Even by one day's unwatchfulness in conversation and conduct, a careful Christian may feel how he loses in point of faith, hope, and

charity; how he estranges himself from God, and weakens the Divine life in his soul. How much more is this the case with those who for months live in a slothful manner, and lay themselves open to all sorts of temptation?

4. There is another direction, and it concludes the subject: "*And have peace one with another.*"—It is a property of salt to unite: its particles closely adhere to one another. This precept follows, therefore, the former in natural connection. For what is the use and meaning of the whole principle of grace, which our Lord compares to salt? It is infused into men by nature children of wrath, even as others, but now made new creatures in Christ Jesus. Its end is, to gather men into one body; to compact them into one system of union,—first with God, from whom they have separated by sin: to reduce the fallen sons of Adam into a state of subjection to, and reconciliation with, their Maker, by an union never to be dissolved, cemented by the blood of Christ Jesus;—and then to re-unite them to one another in him, in peace and love. And when this blessed work is complete, and evidenced so to be, as it will be, when Jesus shall appear, one day, "the first-born among many brethren," how goodly will it then appear for brethren, children of one Father, to dwell all together in unity for ever! and this will be the bliss of heaven in Christ Jesus. The work of God's Holy Spirit

on the soul is of a piece with this, and meant to promote this. Let Christians cherish the Divine salt in one another, by godly conversation and prayer, and by offices of kindness and charity. Learn to forbear, to forgive, to behold one another as brethren, to have hearts of tenderness for all the brethren of Christ. Well would it have been, had all Christians continued with one name only; but as the sin and folly of men have prevented this, at least all true Christians should feel themselves bound to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." We must not be united in religion with the evil world. There are certain fundamentals, without which men cannot be Christians. Brethren, you know what these are. Stick close to them; be moderate in all other things; and look on all God's people, who live by the faith of Christ in humility and love, as one family. Be these your companions and friends; let those who fear the Lord, often speak to one another. It is a grievous thing to see Christ's church rent into schisms without end; and to observe the pharisaic spirit of some, who can strain at a gnat and swallow a camel; can break Christian concord and unity, for the sake of—one is ashamed to mention what—the veriest trifles; and yet plead conscience in defence of their obstinacy. And it is no less grievous to see persons, who do give hope that they love the

Lord, estranged from one another, and divided in heart for trifles, instead of shewing which can most readily forbear and forgive. I have seen both these evils among us. This is not to keep the salt, but to wash it away. May we be wise in time, keep up the life of godliness, preserve brotherly love, die in peace, and be re-united in glory!

SERMON V.

A CALL TO REPENTANCE AND CONVERSION.

ACTS ii. 37—39.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

It will be proper to illustrate the case here stated in Sacred History, and to shew what was the real doctrine, and the real influence of that doctrine, by which these men became true Christians. I may then proceed to apply it to the several sorts of persons among ourselves concerned in the subject.

It was not long since Jesus Christ had been crucified, through the malice and impiety of the Jewish nation. His followers were a very small handful indeed, little likely to keep up the credit of their Master's character and doctrine in the world. The rulers and chief priests

plumed themselves, no doubt, on the good success of their management, and expected to hear no more, either in this life or the next, of Jesus Christ. For three years his holy doctrine, just reproofs, and unspotted life, had been very troublesome to them; but now they had, as they thought, put a full end to his kingdom. See here how God taketh the wise in their own craftiness: for now began the Christian church to be raised up into a dignity that soon was to astonish all the world. Politicians were totally confounded in their schemes. The Gospel, thus low and contemptible as it might seem, gathered strength from that period, and is supported to this day. Jesus Christ, I need not tell you, was raised again, and ascended into heaven. He had left a promise behind him of the Holy Ghost to be with his small number of followers, and with all who should afterwards be added to the church in all ages, who should not be of the world, and who should love Jesus; for to all such our Saviour himself promised the Holy Ghost. His Apostles continue praying for this great gift: and on the day of Pentecost they are fully anointed with it. In the might of the Holy Ghost Peter boldly preaches to the Jews; testifies the holy character, truth, and resurrection of Jesus; and solemnly convicts them of great wickedness in rejecting and crucifying the Lord of glory. It pleased God to accompany his preaching with prodigious effect:

"When they heard this, they were pricked to the heart." Yes, the very people who a little before thought they had done well in slaying the Son of God as an impostor, see now that they have fought against God in the most rebellious manner. And, before we proceed, I would just remark to you, how powerful, piercing, and deep is the influence of the Holy Spirit, when he is poured on men as a spirit of conviction. They see now their sin in a strong light; are beat off from all excuses; are sensible of their danger of perishing; do not know how to help themselves; and, with the simplicity of frightened children, they ask Peter and the rest, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter addresses them in the language of comfortable exhortation: 'Change your minds,' says he (for that is repentance); 'be altered in the whole state and frame of your souls; and, instead of slighting or scorning Jesus Christ, receive him now as your only and true Saviour for the remission of sins. Your sins will ruin you for ever, if he be not your Saviour: forgiven they cannot be, but in his name; and he suffered for you, that you might be forgiven. Believe in him, then, for that purpose; and, as a token of your cordial reception of him, and according to his prescribed mode, be baptized in his name. For surely as water washes filthy vessels, so does his blood wash away all sin. And to this I call every

one of you: I except none; I invite you all: for God will make you welcome; such is his loving-kindness and grace in Jesus Christ, who gave himself a ransom for all. And if ye ask what will be the consequence? I will tell you, you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Yes: and by him being made new creatures, you will see, feel, love, and act as new creatures—no longer children of wrath and slaves of Satan; now children of God, and partakers of his Spirit. For the promise is extended to each of you; yes, and to your children also, and to all that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call. Wherever he sends the message of his Gospel to call men, there he makes it their duty, and invites each one of them, to receive all this grace, and become henceforward his reconciled creatures and beloved sons by Christ Jesus.'

Such is the purport of Peter's address. A number gladly received his word. They believed his testimony of the grace of God, as well as of their own vileness and wickedness. They repented accordingly; they believed in Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; they were baptized. Three thousand souls were converted from that time: their conversion was sound and abiding: they rejoiced in the forgiving love of God by Christ; they praised God; they loved one another; they had "one heart and soul;" they "set their affections on

things above;" they became heirs of eternal bliss. What a change! how sudden, yet how firm and sure!

The work continued still to thrive: in the next chapter Peter goes on to exhort every one of the Jews in the same manner: and the success is great. Why, what is all the history of nations, and all the glory of conquerors, compared with this? Are not we interested in it? Is not this the beginning of the Christian church? Do we not call ourselves Christians? Is not the Holy Ghost as needful now as then? I set aside the miraculous part of his operations, as not continued to our time; but to produce conviction, faith, joy, love, heavenly-mindedness, is he not promised for all ages of the church? "If a man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." We have all been baptized, and the first Christians did baptize their children—but it is a small thing to be washed with water—where is the inward washing from the guilt and filth of sin? Have we not a Scripture passage before us, which plainly teaches us what it is to become true Christians? Shall we not go to the fountain-head, and try ourselves by it? I put these questions; God help us to examine and apply; and I proceed to speak,

1st, To the many who never gave themselves any serious thought on the subject; who are content with the name of Christians, and the form of baptism, and a general assent to Chris-

tianity, and something of a regular life. Can you call this Christianity? Is there any thing like what we have now seen in the case of the converted Jews? Ought not you to seek conversion? Where is the remission of sins by Jesus Christ; and, before that, where is the pricking of heart in the conviction of guilt, and the serious cry, "What shall we do?" I shall shew you, that in this way conversions were uniformly effected in the primitive church.

In this book of the Acts we have a plain account of several conversions under different circumstances; but the same inward change of state and character, attended with the same influence of the Holy Ghost, appears in all. You who have called yourselves Christians, and are quite strangers to any dealings between God and your souls, read carefully this short and most instructive history, and learn something for your own benefit. Suffer me to hint to you a few cases there recorded.

Here is the Ethiopian Eunuch, whom Philip addresses on the road. He finds him reading the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, and opens to him Christ Jesus, there exhibited crucified for his sins; shewing him from thence, that, like sheep, he had gone astray, and turned to his own way, and the Lord had laid on Him his iniquity. The Eunuch applies all this to himself, is baptized, believes, rejoices in Jesus. Felt he not a new heart and new spirit, with peace by the blood

of Jesus and the kingdom of heaven opened to him? And did not Saul of Tarsus find himself a condemned and lost creature before God, when he asked, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" He prayed for three days in deep distress, and the Lord visited him with the message of salvation, and he "washed away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord," and was "filled with the Holy Ghost." And does not this great man, speaking to the Galatians, and reminding them of what they had experienced in conversion, ask them, "where was the blessedness they spake of?" Does he not, both there and in the Epistle to the Romans, speak of men being first "shut up to the faith which should after be revealed;" kept under the law, and in the spirit of bondage and slavish fear; and afterwards becoming the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, and having the Spirit of the Son of God in their hearts, crying, Abba, Father;" the Spirit witnessing with their spirits that they were children of God?" What does he mean by men being "sealed by the Spirit," and having "the earnest of the Spirit in their hearts?" And did not the Gospel come to the Thessalonians, "not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance?"

To return to the Acts. Behold the grave, serious, thoughtful Cornelius, "full of good works and alms-deeds." But how did he obtain

peace of conscience? By believing in Jesus, whom Peter set forth to him, he passed from the slavish state in which a guilty conscience had kept him, into a state of liberty and full remission of sins. For he knew, as well as St. Paul, that "in him dwelt no good thing."—Behold the trembling Jailer, in intention a self-murder already, but now alarmed in conscience, and afraid of the wrath to come: "What must I do to be saved?" Had he asked many in our days, he had doubtless received a very different answer from that which he did receive. So it has to come to pass, that even the majority can call themselves Christians, and yet not direct the convinced sinner to Jesus Christ for salvation. With us he had been by many directed to comfort himself by some good deeds, and a superficial, confused notion of repentance and a good life, that left him without the new birth entirely. But he was directed to "believe on the Lord Jesus, and so he should be saved:" and he did so, and he was saved; and "he rejoiced, believing in God, with all his house."—And in the short accounts we have of sermons in the Acts, the constant method is to convict men of sin, to drive them off from every hope in themselves, to shew them the wrath of God and the day of judgment and their own just condemnation by the law; at the same time pointing out to them free and full justification by Jesus Christ. But, in the 13th of Acts, hear St. Paul, how

divinely he speaks: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him, all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you." The Gentiles were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord. They rejoiced, and were thankful that God had such mercy in store for sinners; and, by believing, they were reconciled to God accordingly, and they were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost.

Thus to throw men down by the Law, and to raise them again by the Gospel, this is the preaching of the word, and this agrees with God's own work by his Spirit. To the Jews nothing more suitable could be alleged, than to shew them their great guilt in crucifying Christ; for what could so soon cut down the proud dreams of their own righteousness, as the conviction of a crime so inexpressibly dreadful? But any fair and true way of shewing that men are in themselves justly liable to the wrath of God, to stop their mouths, and bring them to the Publican's frame, "God be merciful to me a sinner," is right and scriptural. And I wish I knew, ye careless ones, to whom

I am now speaking, in what way you might be made thus humbled. For you must be pricked in heart, and ask seriously "What must we do?" or faith in Christ will be a thing to you for ever unknown. And since ye are sinful and corrupted beings, as men formerly were; and there is no way but one of salvation, and you see how uniformly it is described in Scripture; how long will it be ere you admit this conviction for yourselves, that you may repent, and believe, and receive the Holy Ghost? You can scarce admit a doubt but that we set before you the plain truth of Scripture; yet do you not still flinch from it, cavil at it, explain it away, corrupt it with excessive cautions, strive in vain to reconcile it to the world's taste and spirit, and to the love of sin; still unwilling to come to God by Christ, and bear cheerfully the cross of Jesus, even the reproach which every true believer must undergo? I beseech now every careless person in this house, all who never hitherto applied these things to themselves, to take the Scriptures into their serious consideration, to pray diligently, and use every means seriously for just information; and not to rest till they know what it is to be pricked in conscience, and get quit of those stout, unfeeling hearts which they have always nourished in proud rebellion against God; and till they find what is meant by true repentance, lively faith in Jesus, and the whole genuine work of the Holy Spirit.

2. For this ye are preparing, whom I speak to in the second class. You ask, "What shall we do?" being convinced of your sinful state, and feeling daily the plague of a corrupt nature, as well as the guilt of past transgressions. You are but too apt to block up the road to your own peace. But know for your comfort, that God has made it *your duty* (hear Peter speak to you in the text) to "believe in Jesus"—mark it! every one of you—"for the remission of sins." What though you are helpless, and feel so, and your own nature is too hard to be melted, and you have no strength in yourselves, yet "the promise of the Holy Ghost is *to you*, and to all afar off." You are called on, brethren, even by my mouth, to come to God by Christ, and accept of salvation, that so you may receive the promise of the Spirit, through faith.—Now, let us come to a close settlement of this business. You are Gentiles, brethren, to whom Christ, the "light of the Gentiles," is come: for God has given him for a light to the Gentiles, to be God's "salvation unto the end of the earth." He came that he might say to the prisoners, "Come forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves." Let it not discourage you, that you feel yourselves very dark, very evil, and very guilty: if you be truly pricked in heart, it must be so. It is to no purpose to say in this case, that you must be filled with the Holy Ghost, and so walk in newness

of life,—a great and precious truth, surely, but it does not apply to the case. The order and way by which you must have the Spirit, is to be attended to. Ye become the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus; and, because ye are sons, "God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." This is St. Paul's statement of the case: and see now what you are to do. If you had never been baptized, I should exhort you literally, in St. Peter's words, "Be baptized in the name of Jesus, for the remission of your sins." But as I believe it the duty of Christians to baptize their infants, after the pattern of the primitive church, and as the ancient Jewish church circumcised their children, I say to you, Confirm your baptism, wash away your sins really in the blood of Christ. Content not yourselves with the outward sign; receive the inward and spiritual grace. Believe on Jesus, and receive him as your Prophet, Priest, and King, in his full character of Saviour, and even this day he is yours; for he is always ready: "the oxen and fatlings are killed, and all things ready, come to the marriage." This is your duty, this is the promise; thus the Lord calls you, having brought the word of the Gospel to you; and if I said less than this, or if I corrupted all this by telling you it was not your duty, or by discouraging penitent souls, as if the road was not open to you, I should feel condemned, as not declaring the whole counsel of

God, or at least very lamely setting forth the Gospel of Jesus. I leave it to God to apply his word; exhorting you not only to consider, but also to obey the truth as it is in Jesus, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. I add only this needful caution: if any person goes on day by day in a sense of guilt and misery, let him not complain of any but himself if he continue still unable to conquer his sins: he does not take the right method for it. God calls him to receive his gracious forgiveness by faith, that faith may work by love.

3. And are there not, in the last place, those among us who have found peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, being justified by faith? And is there not, brethren, peace in believing; and did you ever know what happiness was, till you found this? And how did you obtain it? Was it not by following Peter's direction; repenting, and coming over to Jesus; from Satan to God, by him; washing your robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb? And surely there is an earnest of the Spirit, or the witnessing of the Spirit, which attends true faith in Christ. When a man is once persuaded to submit to Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth, God does send forth the Spirit of his Son into the heart, crying, Abba, Father. I shall not be solicitous to express these things in other than Scripture language, which is the most proper vehicle of Divine

truth. When the text says, "ye shall be filled with the Holy Ghost," I ask, is it not thus brethren? And when Christ says, "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink," does he not fulfil what he says, according to the Scripture, "I will pour water on the thirsty, and floods on the dry ground?" I call, then, on you, who know the truth of these things by some good experience, if it be in a small degree, to value and keep your happiness in Christ. As it was by the simplicity of believing in Jesus that you first had the consolations of God's Holy Spirit, remember they must be preserved in the same way still. Take heed of the evil heart of unbelief, which shews itself in departing from the living God; and, in these days of grievous opposition to simple primitive Christianity, stick to the Fountain-head. As Christians were made under Peter's preaching, so must they be made now. Beware of being spoiled by philosophy and vain deceit, after the rudiments of men. There is as much occasion to dread that now, as in St. Paul's time. It is an easy thing by specious arguments to be beguiled and confounded in a subject in which every man has a foe within ready to side with the enemy. Nothing on earth is more precious than true experimental godliness, such as the text sets forth; and nothing on earth is man so prone to hate or to pervert. You need, therefore, much watching and prayer, that you may live to the end the life

that you do live by the faith of the Son of God. And in your choice of company, and of advisers in religion, observe, I beseech you, our Saviour's safe and golden rule; "By their fruits ye shall know them." If a man be even very ingenious and sensible, yet, if his life shew him without the love of God, regard him not. It is a million to one but, if he undertake to speak or write on the Christian religion at all, he will be wrong; because the natural man does not receive the things of God, nor can know them. Let men's obstinacy be ever so great, or let them swell with self-conceit ever so high, they cannot come at Christian wisdom and understanding but by the Holy Ghost. All Scripture says so, and let you and me simply believe it, and pray all our days for wisdom. And no man, who knows himself at all, and how blind as well as wicked sin has made him, will doubt this. How glad and thankful, in truth, should we be for such a promise as, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth liberally to all men, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." Remember, brethren, how it was with you, when the day-star first arose on your hearts; how simple you were, child-like, teachable, conscious of ignorance! And how welcome was the simple doctrine of forgiveness of sins by Jesus, and the gift of the Holy Ghost! Is this doctrine now less true, less suitable to human wants and miseries? or are we grown too wise

for it, and have got above it? or are we to compliment infidels, sceptics, and mere theoretical Christians, with some less offensive modes of speech, and to be ashamed of the truth as it is in Jesus? You cannot please people of this sort but by giving up the whole. They have a determined enmity. God alone can change the heart. But as it is our duty, as means and instruments, to do what we can for them and for all men, that which tends most to unsettle, to alarm, to startle, to convict them, that is most likely to do them good, because they need an entire change. To accommodate the Gospel to them, is to poison their souls, and, by handing out false representations, to help them, as it were, to deceive themselves.

Brethren, have ye Christ, are ye filled with the Spirit? Oh then "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works." While they remain lovers of sin, and worldly-minded, it is impossible to please them by any mode whatever of representing Gospel-truth, provided the truth be declared; but do them good, and shew that you are sincerely bent on doing them good by every method. Let the law of kindness be on your lips, and let it appear in all your life. Be not high-minded, condescend to the low; and be content to be thought fools for Christ's sake. I know no glory on earth equal to this. But act not foolishly; you know you have the highest

wisdom, the Spirit of God, with you, to direct and govern you. Live righteously, soberly, and godly: sigh for the mansions above; there is true rest with Jesus. But while you are here, you must prove that he indeed dwells in you by his Spirit; and that must be by walking as he walked, patient, meek, charitable, beneficent. And as the promise is to you and to your children, exert yourselves in your families to support godliness there. Let precept and example go hand in hand. Shew your children what real religion is: not a party, sectarian thing; nor a piece of philosophy; but the simple truth as it is in Jesus, which Peter preached with so much success to the Jews. Thus may you humbly trust that the promise which has been fulfilled to you will be fulfilled to them also, and that they will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

SERMON VI.

THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT.

LUKE xi. 13.

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

IN the parallel place in the seventh chapter of St. Matthew, in the Sermon on the Mount, the expression runs, Give "*good things*" to them that ask him. The terms illustrate one another; the essence of all good things being the Holy Spirit.—Let us first illustrate the thoughts of the text, and see in general what the great thing is which is to be learnt from it; and then apply the doctrine of it to the consciences of men.

It is one of the most commonly known, and in truth one of the most useful texts, in all the Scriptures. Any man, who is at present altogether wrong and ignorant in religion, may safely begin with it. And were I to be called on to speak to a person who had never heard of Jesus Christ, this would be one of the most important things he ought to be informed of, that the God whose religion that of the Scriptures is, is one who hears prayers, and will

pour out his Spirit on them that ask him, to open his religion to their understandings, and to rectify their hearts by it. I should think it right to put him on the use of all those means which God has provided for his illumination and instruction, and yet should direct him to place his dependence here on God, through Christ: for these are the very words of Christ himself. In his name it is that we are to go to the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit: and surely he who asks must obtain; the words of Christ must be made good. The text is a promise, as well as an exhortation to a duty. And how can we think that the cries of a praying sinner, now turning to God by Christ, and imploring Divine direction, should be lost? You might as well suppose that the whole of religion is a mere fable. These cries of earnest prayer reach the ears of the Heavenly Father: the Son of God, through whom alone he forgives and hears, is ready to intercede: the words I have this day read, which he spake on earth, must be made good; the credit of Christ, who is Truth itself, must be supported, as well as the reality of his mediation and intercession: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." It is in this way that the Holy Spirit is vouchsafed, souls are enlightened, Christians are made, and Christ's true religion from age to age is kept up in the world.

I will suppose now, and hope it may be more

than mere supposition, that there may be some persons, hitherto ignorant or careless, who are wishing to partake of the grace of God, and would be glad to set about religion, and desire distinct information how they ought to proceed. You must begin as all true Christians do: they are led to pray for the Holy Spirit. While men think they are right in the main already, they will never pray heartily. It is not merely assenting to the words of a form of prayer by an "amen;" it is not uttering words of prayer merely: it is hearty asking; and if hearty, persevering of course in it, in such a manner as to take no denial, from day to day; sensible that if prayer be not answered we are undone, and that the Holy Spirit is the very thing we want and must have if we be happy. This is the asking that is meant in the text; less than this is only trifling with God and with ourselves. Here, then, is the asking meant in the text; and here is the grand direction to such an inquirer as I mentioned. All who are now confirmed in the truth as it is in Jesus, and are walking in the light and comfort of the Gospel, began this way. They found themselves dark and helpless, in a state of sin; and such a promise as this was a relief and encouragement to them; and they sought God till they found him. I call, then, on any person who has hitherto taken no pains to save his soul, but now wishes to be rightly informed, and is in some degree moved with the

spirit of inquiry concerning the works of the Lord, to use this method:—Take the words of Christ simply and literally as they stand; pray in his name for the accomplishment of them; plead them at the Throne of Grace. And while you search the Scriptures carefully, and your own hearts, and keep from evil so far as you know it, and neglect no means of God's appointment, and continue seeking God with a dependence on his promises, you shall be guided right. If you are by no means satisfied *now*, you shall find what is right and good and true *in due season;* yes, and shall taste of the goodness of the Lord.

You see the meaning and the use of the text together: and that the encouragement which the words give may the more distinctly engage you to a serious use of them, read and consider well the whole passage in the former part of the chapter.

Our Lord himself you find, in the beginning of the chapter, praying. He set us an example of all good; he fulfilled all righteousness: and, as man, he prayed to his Heavenly Father, and was answered and supported through all his trials. On the request of one of his disciples, he taught them how to pray, by the short form commonly called the Lord's Prayer—the Divine beauty and excellency of which I stay not to consider, that we be not diverted from the immediate business before us. But, because men are apt to faint if not heard immediately,

he recites a parable, of a friend at midnight importuning another friend to supply him with three loaves, and obtaining his desires by the mere force of importunity, even if there were no friendship in the case. This shews us what true prayer is,—an importunate thing, which will not be denied; and than which, if we except the voice of grateful thanksgiving and praise, I do not believe there is any sound in heaven more agreeable, however slighted it be by proud men on earth. Alas! God is angry, not at the number, but the fewness, not at the earnestness, but coldness, of our prayers! This parable, then, explains the true spirit of prayer; and our Lord goes on to encourage us: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." And, as if this was not enough, he repeats, "For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." So that there is no exclusion here, but of such a sort that a man excludes himself, as, alas! numbers do, who live without seeking God. See with what meekness of wisdom the Saviour goes on to reason with us: "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone; or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent; or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children"——what a confession is this of that

great Christian doctrine of the evil nature of man as a fallen creature! Our Lord does not say, that some parents are evil; but he speaks to his hearers in general; he speaks of the nature of *man*, and he "knew what was in man." Man is "evil," and, as evil, he is not disposed to do good. He is selfish and hard-hearted. Yet, to preserve society, and to answer various useful purposes, it has pleased God still to preserve in men, notwithstanding the Fall, the instinct of parental affection. Who gave this? who infused it into mankind? Certainly, He who is the source of all the tenderness and compassion and kindness that is in the world, and has so liberally diffused this amiable instinct into all animated nature without exception, is himself possessed of tenderness and compassion in an inexhaustible degree. He who is "Love" itself, and whose "tender mercies are over all his works," will most surely give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.

What *asking* means has been sufficiently illustrated. The certainty of success is here described. The argument is invincible. If your conscience speaks for you that you are continually praying day by day, you may plead it with much comfort at the Throne of Grace; and doubt not but your desires shall be all granted. If God be a Heavenly Father to us, it is through Jesus Christ alone. And therefore, if you ask, How can I speak to God as

my Heavenly Father? you may consider whether you ask him in the name of Christ. Those who do so continually are God's elect: as he says in another parable, meant, like that which we have seen, to encourage prayer. "Shall not God," says he, "avenge his own elect, which cry day and night to him?" Those who live without prayer, do certainly cut themselves off from all benefit in the subject: but they who cry day and night unto God are his children; and sooner far shall an earthly parent cease to love or regard his offspring, or pity them in their distresses, than God shall cease to hear the petitions of those who ask him in his Son's name.

A few words more on the gift of the Holy Spirit, the great thing here prayed for, and I shall have finished the illustration of the text. The Holy Spirit is the grand blessing of the New Testament. Without him, all religion is dead; mere form at best. It is in his light alone that the true nature and excellency of Christ's religion is understood. And there are a thousand doubts and scruples and cavils, which a creature so proud, and at the same time so ignorant, as man, is ever apt to make against Divine truths: the gift of the Holy Spirit silences these things, and gives full satisfaction to the mind inquiring what true religion is. And if a man do not obtain satisfaction in this way, he will never have it, in a right manner, in any other way. This is the great promise of the

New Testament. Our Saviour promised to send down to his disciples Him whom the world cannot receive, but who is the great gift belonging to those who love Jesus. He alone manifests Jesus to the heart; and, after having done his first work, of humbling, awakening, and convincing men of their sinfulness and misery, he alone enables the soul to cleave to Christ, and to abide fast by him in life and death. The new birth is his work. He forms the new creature in Christ Jesus. Through him men obtain peace by the atoning blood of Jesus, and submit to be saved with all gladness and thankfulness in God's way. Through him they are comforted and encouraged to hold out in all tribulations. What shall I say? Whether to know the love of God in Christ to us, or to return that love by loving him again in unfeigned gratitude; to forgive injuries; to delight in the law of God after the inward man; to mortify the body of sin that dwells in us—all real good is of the Holy Spirit: man has nothing of himself that will produce it. Fallen as he is, he can go no farther than outward things. Morals, decency, and form, are the utmost he can reach; to cleanse the heart is God's own work. He does it by the Holy Spirit. When a man knows what these things mean, he sees what he has to thank God for, as a Father, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; and can give glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. What mean men, to scorn and

scoff at the new birth? Alas! I would convince men of their great sinfulness herein, who have done it times without number, and yet never think themselves any other than Christians.

Here, you see, is all true religion; and here you see the way to seek for it and to obtain it. The subject is very plain, and has been plainly handled. I must now apply it to your hearts and consciences, and ask you, whether you have ever learnt it to purpose? I shall speak, first, to those who are satisfied with their spiritual condition without the Holy Spirit, and without praying for him; secondly, to those who are praying day by day, but are discouraged with darkness and temptations; and, lastly, to those who know and have proved the truth of the subject.—O Divine Saviour, look on us with pity; remember thy promises to thy church; enlighten us by thy Spirit. Have mercy on us, miserable sinners!

1st. When I say I have to apply the subject to those who are satisfied without the Holy Spirit, I may justly appeal to the feelings of a very large part of mankind. The word of God constantly describes man as a creature, now in his natural state, having lost the Divine image; with no knowledge of God, or delight in him; in his flesh dwelleth no good thing; he is turned from God, to self and sin and the creature, in the whole course of his affections. Let him enjoy health and worldly prosperity, and

succeed in his schemes after pleasure, honour, or riches, and he would never wish to enjoy God at all. God, as an object of delightful enjoyment, is unknown to him. Is not this true of many here present, who all their lives have sought nothing else than the gratification of their natural lusts and passions; and, except a form of religion, and such external right conduct as is necessary for the good of society, do not attend to religion at all? Unhappy men! the fear and love of God you regard not: religion, as a thing that is to affect the heart you do not value. The plain difference between you and real Christians is, that you are without the Holy Spirit, they are possessed of the Holy Spirit; you despise or neglect him, they pray for him. For though a Christian has for years been influenced by the Holy Ghost, he needs him afresh every day, as much as if he had never partaken of his influences at all; because *in himself* he is as dark and as empty of all true goodness as ever. It is by Christ alone that he has the favour of God; and in proportion as he receives Christ to dwell in his heart, he is possessed of the Spirit of Christ; and this is needful to preserve the Divine life in his soul from day to day. You, then, I speak to, who have never begun to live in Christ by faith. Your thoughts and desires do not run in a heavenly way at all. If you are drunkards, fornicators, profane swearers, or the like, your conscience tells

you so at once. But though you do live more decently than the characters which have been mentioned, yet, with your thoughts and desires fixed on this world, you are as really out of the favour of God as they. If it be not so (for the great difficulty is to persuade you), that your state is thus evil, I ask you, when did you ever solemnly, in all your lives, retire for prayer to God; and, knowing how much you needed his Holy Spirit to teach you the knowledge of him, when did you pray seriously in the name of Christ, as we are directed to do in the very encouraging words of the text? Recollect, if you can, the time and place. A real Christian, I must tell you, does it daily; and at particular seasons, and under trying circumstances, very often; and he finds that the Lord is with him, and supplies him from time to time. What says conscience? Have you never seriously in your life prayed for the Holy Ghost? Has this always been a distant thing with you, and never been pressed on your conscience as a duty? and have you never felt your spiritual wants so urgent as to stimulate you to it? It seems so. You can feel if your body is out of order: your souls have been all out of order, void of the love of God, and unreconciled to him, all your lives, and you have not felt nor regarded it; or if conscience gave you a pang now and then, you soon quieted it in a false way, or scattered your thoughts by a variety

of amusements. Such as you, never think alone of your soul's condition. You may have your ears open to all the news of the town, or be busy night and day in the arts of getting money; but your soul is not to you of the value of a small sum. And now see, I pray you, what sort of Christians you are: You were baptized in the name of Christ, and profess to be his disciples; and in the chapter of my text he gives you large encouragements for praying to God for his Holy Spirit, and in the Sermon on the Mount you will find the same thing; and you have lived now thirty, forty, or fifty years in the world, and have never so much as once put in practice what he directs you to. You may have often said prayers, and joined in public worship with your lips, as hypocrites, but your hearts are far from God. And if it were not so, as Christ is true in his promises, and God is faithful to fulfil what he has declared, you would not be seen living such unholy lives, so void of the fear of God, as you do.

Will you still stand to it that you have prayed for the Holy Spirit? Alas, brethren! your careless, worldly lives shew you have not. But, as I know it is very difficult to persuade you, I will say two things to you:—First, If ever you come to know yourselves, you will see you have never prayed aright; as St. Paul the Apostle I doubt not did, when he was brought to pray at Damascus. He then believed he

had never prayed before: it would not have been easy for any one to have convinced him, while in his proud pharisee state, that he had never prayed. And, secondly, I will exhort you to go and make sure work of it: pray for the Holy Ghost this night, in secret, with as much seriousness as you can. Say, O Lord, teach me the religion of the Holy Spirit, that which has life in it: teach me the good and right way: what I see not, teach me; if I be wrong, O make me willing to be led right: let thy good Spirit teach me, for Christ's sake.—Is this right praying? Is it not according to the word of God? Why are you backward to it? Is not this the cause? you will not come to the light, lest your deeds should be reproved. You flatter yourselves, and therefore are unwilling to find yourselves wrong. But know for a certainty, that if ever you have an interest in the blood of the Redeemer, you must know him by the Spirit: "No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." If ever you come to have peace through his blood, it must be by the power of the Spirit. If ever you come to heaven, you must be holy; and what holiness will you ever have, if destitute of the Holy Spirit?

Now see how you are affected about the godly motions of the Holy Spirit. Men who are in good earnest about them, prize them; love to understand them, so far as their duty is concerned in them, for they are in their own

nature unsearchable; are desirous of being made sensible of the operations of the Spirit on their own minds from day to day. And if you ask what these operations do? they humble a man; they give him enlarged views of the Divine Majesty; they strip him of his own righteousness; they make him glad of the Lord Jesus as his righteousness; they stir him up to pray for enlivening views of Christ, and to believe in, rest on, and love him; and they bring a man to Christ for peace, remission, and sanctification of heart and life, Divine charity, patience in afflictions, and heavenly mindedness. What! are all these operations performed on a person, and he asleep all the time, and quite insensible? Impossible. If such as you cease to call these things enthusiasm, I shall then see no reason to repeat continually that they are not enthusiasm. But such uncharitable and ignorant censures against the best things and the best men are vented continually. What doctrine is true, and what is not, may safely be proved from the manner in which men come by their views in religion. Those who experience the new birth to righteousness, are men who seek wisdom from above, in the name of Christ. They were in doubt; they desired God to direct them; they searched the Scriptures; he guided them by his Spirit to the true view of them; and they were led into the Gospel. It is not so at all with those who despise the new birth:

they do not pray for such illumination: they consider rather what they think ought to be in the Scriptures, than what is in them; for they are proud enough to suppose themselves capable judges. They call this hearkening to their reason: it is hearkening to their unreasonable pride. Such men either have no decided opinions at all, or they hold self-righteous opinions, and more or less mar all the peculiar truths of Scripture.

And I could wish that persons of half-religious seriousness, who wander backward and forward, and make nothing out to purpose in religion, would take their part also in this subject. I could wish that you, and the rest I have spoken to, would begin, for your soul's sake (and I beseech you, for the love of God in Christ towards miserable souls), to bend the knee in prayer, from this time, for the enlightening and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit. Do it in earnest; do it without ceasing; and see the event: and perish not in your presumption and folly.

2dly. I turn to you who have prayed and are praying in this way, but are discouraged by darkness and temptations. Remember, if you give way to murmuring and complaining, Satan will discourage you more and more. Consider, by our Lord's parable in the chapter before us, you have a right to expect to be tried, perhaps much tried, and long. Yet patient importunity will prevail. If you say,

'you would be encouraged to proceed if you found that God had heard you already;' Brethren, be not deceived: ye that fear God, are afraid of sinning above all things, seek salvation by Christ, dare seek it no other way, and are waiting for Divine consolation here in that way, and perfect bliss hereafter, ye *have* been heard already: you have *proof* that your prayers are heard. Who has made you know yourselves, so vile, so foolish, so guilty, as now you see yourselves? Who has shewn you salvation only through Christ? Who has drawn you to separate yourselves from the world, and to be willing to be reproached for the name of Christ? Who has made sin so loathsome to you, and taken off your relish from the vanities with which your hearts were once possessed? These, and more things that might be mentioned, prove that those serious prayers, which alone, between God and your own souls, you uttered from time to time in the name of Christ, are answered. There is a common mistake of young Christians, but some remain in it a long time: it is, to confine all their ideas of prayer being heard only to comfort and sensible joy. You may be without that, and yet have very good proof of your prayers being heard, as we have seen. Be not so selfish in your religion. Be earnest for spiritual comfort, but wait the Lord's leisure for it. Bear your cross, and go on praying, and in the path of duty, and all your desires

will be answered in God's time. And keep on your minds the fulness of consolation which the text affords. As Christ is true; as he ministers for you in heaven, interceding; as the Father will make good his words, and regards your petitions with much greater earnestness and compassion than ever your earthly parents did; trust him, and expect the best things from him in time and eternity.

Lastly: I never think it needful to say so much to established Christians: yet these I must speak to in conclusion. You know that these things are true: experience has convinced you of it. You have a proof of the certainty of the Scriptures, much more satisfying than any other: believing on the Son of God, you have the witness in yourselves. Treasure up past experience of Christ's love. To keep up Christian simplicity must be your daily endeavour. Go on in the same simple way in which you were taught at first. Watch against the snares and distractions of the world; watch against pride and vain-glory; watch against false refinements in religion. It is time for you to shew your thankfulness to God for his great mercies; to be fathers in Christ; and to be useful by word and deed in helping forward the work of God on younger converts. And, look forward: in a little time the new nature you have received in Christ will be taken up into heaven. There your treasure is; there, simply, let your heart be also.

SERMON VII.

THE BANDS OF LOVE.

HOSEA xi. 4.

I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love.

NOTHING can be conceived more affectionate, more tender, and more apt to melt the soul in the finest feelings of love, than the views of Scripture which represent the loving-kindness of Jehovah. There are many such descriptions in the word of God; it would, indeed, be to recite a very large part of the Psalms, and the Prophets, and the New Testament, to lay them before you. No allusion which gives us the idea of the kindest affections is omitted. Sometimes Jehovah appears as a husband: "Thy Maker is thine husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the Lord hath called thee, as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth when thou wast refused, saith thy God." Sometimes, as a most tender mother: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they

may forget, yet will I not forget thee." In the chapter of the text he appears as a most kind father: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." A little after, as a nurse—(wondrous condescension!):—"I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arm." And, when provoked at their perverseness and enormities he represents himself as ready to forsake them, how amiably does the heart of a tender father appear! "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim; how shall I deliver thee, Israel?" I cannot do it; my affection for thee will not allow it: "mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together."

What manner of love is this! But it is our wisdom to consider these things as descriptive of the real character of the blessed God, not merely as metaphors and fine flowers of speech. For it is under a believing view of the God of grace, thus really gracious, really compassionate, that the very instructive words of the text are to be fulfilled upon us: "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." And, O thou tender-hearted, compassionate, infinitely lovely Lord God our Creator, do thou be pleased by thy good Spirit to let in the true light of thy gracious character into our souls this day! Have pity on our blindness, weakness, and ignorance; and O give us such a spiritual sight of thee, that we may be drawn to love thee in some degree as we ought!

And first, this gracious character of the blessed God, as it is in itself, shall be briefly laid open; and then the use and application of it to various states of men shall be given.

1. I shall not spend your time in considering the case of Israel in particular. For what Jehovah was to Israel in kindness and affection, flowed from his gracious nature, which we are considering; and in his dealings with Israel we see a shadow of his dealings with the Church in all ages. He is said to draw men, then, with the cords of a man, with bands of love, when he wins our hearts by the most engaging and endearing acts of kindness. "A whip for the horse, and a bridle for the ass;" but to draw *men* to love, to reason, to their own interest, motives of love are the best adapted, at least are the most desirable. He would draw us, then, to love, serve, and obey him, by the most winning motives, such as are apt to excite the grateful affections of mankind, such as men are most influenced by in their dealings with one another. This, I take it, is the exact meaning of the text, "He drew them with the cords of a man, with bands of love." And, oh, if the character and real nature of God were more known among us, this sweet drawing in its powerful effects would also be better understood. But it has, perhaps, been unwarily and too largely asserted, by divines in our days, that all those descriptions of God's pity and kindness which we meet with in Scripture are

more metaphorical or comparative speeches, used in condescension to us. If those who are fond of this way of treating the Divine character would have us to look on them as no marks at all of the nature of God, I see not of what possible use they can be. How can we be drawn by God's love as the cords of a man, if we believe not love to be in him, or if the word "love" means not the same thing in God and in man? What information can we receive from such descriptions? When, then, it is said, "it grieved the Lord at his heart that he had made man on the earth," cannot I conceive that he really felt grief on the account? though surely not such a grief as we feel, because ours, by reason of its excess, and various sinful mixtures, disturbs our happiness, which must not for a moment be conceived in the Almighty. As this, so all other instances of the like kind are to be guarded: in God the affections are pure and undefiled, every way worthy of his infinite majesty. But still, God, whose name is love, does love; is loving to every man; and his tender mercies are over all his works. The words "love" and "tender mercies" are surely not mere sounds; they speak the heart of God. It is our duty and wisdom to think of them habitually in this light, that we may be drawn with cords of a man; as one man's love is engaged by the lovely and loving dispositions of another. I fear, for want of thus realizing the loving qualities of God, under pretence of our

ignorance of him, we are many of us apt to have no idea of him at all, or a very false one.

I have thus enlarged, in order to do justice to the text, and, if possible, make you to see its literal truth; "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." Indeed, who durst treat the blessed God so familiarly, if He had not revealed himself to be thus gracious? For it is not from the works of nature that we learn this character of God. Some helps may thence be drawn, to build themselves up in faith, by those who know God already. But a world like this, full of misery, is not likely to give us lovely views of God, till we know how to clear him and blame ourselves, as Jesus teaches us, and have learnt his real nature from the Scriptures: in fact, no man does love God, but he who has learnt his nature from the Bible. There are, indeed, other views of God besides this of love; as, the God of all power; and the infinitely wise, just, and holy Governor of the world. In these characters he displays a mysterious wisdom and a frequency of severe judgments. But if you are once taught of God by his Spirit, and know his very heart to be love, you will no more be moved from this sweet view of him by his severe judgments against the wicked, and chastisements of his own sons, than you suspect an upright Judge to be cruel and hard-hearted because he passes sentence of death on criminals. The real glory of God, and the

health of the universe, may require such tremendous severities; and if once we saw the infinite love of God, we should not be surprised that the hatred of him (and to sin is to hate him) deserves eternal punishment. But the present age is, beyond the example of former times, daring in its reasonings on the Divine judgments.

Forgetting, then, these proud reasonings, and sticking close to the sweet view of God drawing us with cords of love, view, my dear brethren, our all-glorious Creator as loving to every man, and whose tender mercies are over all his works. View him as grieved and lamenting to see a world so averse to the love of him, though that be their own happiness. View him as loth to strike, and bearing, with a patience truly godlike, truly his own, the oaths and curses, the irreverence and profaneness, the pride and contempt, the deceit and fraud, the cruelty and hard-heartedness, of a rebellious world. View him, as having provided a way to reconcile his mercy toward us with the most awful displays of his justice. What a God! his own Son bleeds on a cross; he bears the whole load of punishment due to us! And now, view God "so loving the world as to give his own Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" and view him as having commissioned us, poor sinful beings like yourselves, and heeding the same mercy for our own souls,

to pray you in Christ's stead to be reconciled to him. Was ever love like this? Do sovereigns entreat rebels who lie at mercy, to be reconciled? But these are the cords of a man, with which he draws you. And consider, the gain is yours if you receive his love; the loss is yours if you do not. What add we to infinite perfection and happiness, by taking care of our own interest? So pure, so rich, is this love! And, that none may be out of the reach of this voice of love, be it known to you, that he would have all men to be saved by coming to the knowledge of this precious truth, salvation by Jesus. He excludes none, if you will not exclude yourselves: "whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." And see the riches of his love! not only a pardon is offered, a free pardon, of all past sins, requiring no satisfaction that you can make—Jesus did all in the way of satisfaction—but the gift of eternal life, of eternal enjoyment of God.—What! are rebels, then, received as sons? Yes, sons and daughters of God you may be, even the vilest and the proudest sinners, if not sealed up in a pride of heart that refuses the remedy.

What a door to licentiousness! perhaps some say: is this true doctrine? Yes: all Scripture testifies it. God's love is thus wonderful. "His ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts." His love is free, our works cannot buy it. I repeat again the last sweet

call of the Bible; "whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely;" and oh that the proudest, the most stubborn, and the most vicious sinners in this house, were persuaded to believe in him, and to receive their salvation from him by faith! He never fails to give the Spirit, through faith; and the Spirit sealing their redemption, and witnessing with their spirits, would convince them indeed, far, very far beyond what my feeble voice can do, that God is love; they would feel him to be their Father, their Husband, and their Friend. And would they, under this real believing view, think you, continue in their sins, and be encouraged to follow their vices? Is this a natural conclusion? Oh no: I would to God this congregation were brought to know and believe God's love; they would certainly find its generous nature: it would draw them to love him again. But men think they do believe in God's love when they do not, and therefore continue enslaved by sin. What, think you, can in reason persuade a man habituated to vice and wickedness, and inwardly loving the ways of sin (as indeed all of us naturally do), to love God and his neighbour, and to delight in living soberly, righteously, and godly? Be his vices ever so confirmed, yet let him once taste of redeeming love by forgiveness through faith in Jesus, and there is the heart of the text, the secret spring of a holy life, the power of the Gospel. Thus he will be drawn with

"cords of a man, with bands of love." How will he hate those sins which crucified Jesus! What a sight will he have of the Divine love in God the Father and in God the Son! what a sweet idea of the Divine character! He will say, 'I never thought God to be so gracious a God. I never knew him before. I loathe myself and all my past iniquities and abominations.' And if all this be natural and plain, what can he want to make him live a holy life? If he loathes sin and loves God, he must, he will, be holy, and the most stubborn vices will all lose their power. In fact, this is the only way in which men are brought to true goodness. These are the cords of a man, these the bands of God's love, with which you are to be drawn. You must despair of all other hopes. Your resolutions, and works, and all your contrivances, will not do it: your hearts will still be hard. God knows how to draw you. He who made us, knows the springs that will move us to him;—pardoning mercy, joy, and comfort, this will do it. Oh! learn to know God and believe him, and you will find it so.

This, brethren, is "the Lord, the Lord God, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin"—these are the cords of a man, these the bands of love with which he draws us.

Let me now speak a word,

1st, To all *careless persons*, who have no fear

of God before their eyes.—You I speak to, who think not of God from day to day, but yet are living on his earth, maintained in being by his breath, and fed and clothed by his bounty. And is it comely, think you, to live day by day without thankfulness and reverence to the greatest and best of Beings? Is there nothing in his character that excites your admiration and gratitude? But, as self-love is with you at present the predominant motive, what is your plan for gratifying it; where is your happiness? Will uncleanness, drunkenness, loose company, and a round of pleasures, give you enjoyment? There is no true enjoyment in them, you know, or may know it. A weary, listless, vacant mind, an uneasy or stupid conscience, and the gnawing fear of death and judgment, are all they leave you. And can any enjoyment be like that of the favour of the blessed God who made you? Consider who He is. The most dignified spirits of heaven place all their happiness in the enjoyment of him. He it is who fills them with bliss, and will fill them for ever. Set God aside, and heaven were no heaven. And what a condescension is it, that He has remembered us also in our low estate, and when we had sinned ourselves into misery, as the conscience of each man bears witness: yet he parted with his only-begotten Son, that we might live through him. Hear him: he calls you to behold this inexpressible loving-kindness, to taste

that he is gracious to you on the strength of it, and to receive the pledges of his love by an everlasting covenant. If ye be willing and obedient to the voice of his love in Jesus, he will freely pardon all your sins, as though they never had been committed; he will even take you into his family, and make you of the number of his children, and give you an inheritance among his sons: as Jesus fares so shall you, for he will shew his love to you as he does to him. Think, and be astonished, and be melted in your souls to think, what manner of love this is, that even such as you, fornicators, profane swearers, sabbath-breakers, despisers of God, liars, cheats, hard-hearted, unmerciful ones, may, by repenting of your sins, and heartily glorifying the word of the Lord's salvation, become the sons of God, and reign with his only-begotten Son for ever. But this is the kindness of God: thus he "commends his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Think how soon your patience and kindness are worn out by repeated ungrateful treatment; but even this day, though some of you may have provoked the Lord for many years, you may be reconciled to him: such the inexpressible kindness of his nature. Dwell upon it in your minds; think how great goodness this is: conceive, if you can, any thing like it: for I have not words to describe it, nor even a heart to conceive it. Consider, as ye are

men, and may be drawn by the cords of a man, with bands of love, how would you be affected, supposing a person who is much your superior in life, whom you had abused and vilified exceedingly, and to whom you were under the greatest obligations, should yet declare his readiness at any time to forgive all, and even to load you with still greater favours,—even to take you into his family, treat you as his child, and make you a joint-heir of his estate with his own children,—when once you heartily would acknowledge your offence and thankfully accept of his mercy. 'Amazing!' you say, 'such kindness is not to be found on earth.' Yet is it but a faint shadow of the goodness and mercy of God in Christ, which even this day he offers to your acceptance.

Surely men think little, believe very little, of the goodness of God, or such views must influence them. In the case I put, you would be moved to gratitude, and would be ashamed of your own past baseness, and would strive by every method in your power to shew your thankfulness. These are the cords of a man, the bands of love. You would know what they mean in this case; and is it not a shocking thing, that in the case of God Almighty alone his love should not draw men's hearts? Consider, also, there is nothing gloomy or miserable in the duties to which you are called. It is your own deceitful heart and Satan that tell you so. Get once a believing view of

God's love, and love will make all sweet and pleasant. The music and ribaldry and wantonness of the play-house, the itch of gaming, the bewitching idleness of a dissipated life, will of themselves grow burdensome and nauseous to your spirit, when it has once tasted any thing of the love of God. 'I have found,' you will say, 'true pleasure; I never knew it before.' Let me entreat you to weigh these thoughts, and pray for the grace of the Holy Spirit to impress them on your souls, and to work in you true repentance and true faith, that you may live to enjoy the goodness of God both here and to eternity.

2. But, secondly, a word to *backsliders* will be proper also on this occasion.—I speak to you, who have known formerly what it is to be drawn with the cords of a man, with bands of love. Confess, did you ever find any thing so sweet, so pleasant, in your lives, as the love of God? Did any man's kindness ever move and melt your souls like that of God? You were drawn, but you moved freely, with ingenuous motions: the captivity of the love of Christ constraining you was your sweetest liberty, the service of God was your freedom: one spark of the love of God was the most precious sensation in the world. But 'Oh,' you say, 'that it were with me as in months past! I sinned away all this happiness; I was ungrateful for mercies received; and, oh, how hard, blind, and senseless is my soul at present,

tied and bound with the chain of my sins! The love of this world, and the pride of my heart, led me to hearken to Satan's devices; and I now look on God with horror, as my severe but just Avenger.'—Far be it from me to wish you, O backsliders, not to feel the enormity of your transgressions; you may, you must, if you go on right, be sensible of your sin, and be humbled before the Most High. Repent, then, as at first, but believe also the Gospel as at first: and repent as much as you please, your repentance will not be so deep, nor your self-loathing so hearty and genuine, as it will be when once you can believe that God will pardon all your baseness. It was for no little offences that Christ died—for many, multiplied, aggravated, endless offences. Return to our God, for he will not only pardon, but "abundantly pardon." (Isa. lv.)—"multiply to pardon," the original signifies. Think of David's foul, aggravated guilt; and think of his recovery by grace, and the comfort and peace with which he died: and then say if any bounds can be fixed to the goodness of God. None—where sinners confess their sins, and are truly humbled for them, and apply through Jesus for redemption. Return, therefore, ye backsliders, and be not afraid to put in your plea at a Throne of Grace, and expect a revival, a fresh sense of his mercy: you have all reason to expect it shall not be in vain. Love, with its cords, will draw you; and the sense of Divine good-

ness will subdue all your iniquities. Remember, it is in vain to strive in your own strength against sin. A fresh sense of God's love, such as you had at first, will give you peace and victory, and nothing else will; and as you have full warrant to expect the Lord's mercy by applying for it in the same way as you had it at first, delay not your return. Man is slow to forgive; a much-injured friend is hard to be reconciled: but study the character of God: his love is such, that, when we are brought to true confession, he forgives immediately, whatever our crimes have been. Astonishing kindness! They are cords of love, but more than human. Return to him, penitent, and believing in Christ, and you will experience his grace.—But let no man think to abuse this doctrine to licentiousness. A humbled, confessing sinner, cannot so abuse it; and the comfort of it is limited to such. The proud, so remaining, are not interested in it: them the Lord beholds afar off.

3. There are no persons more directly interested in this whole subject of the loving character of God, than those *upright and sincere souls*, who, having much knowledge of their own wickedness and filthiness by nature, and very tender consciences, are, through the bias of a legal spirit and Satan's temptations, kept from the comfort and liberty of the Gospel. And there are none less apt to take that comfort to themselves which is their due, for none

are less apt to see their own sincerity. "But, O thou afflicted, tossed with tempests and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires; and I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones. And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near thee." Yes, O gracious God, thou canst speak to their hearts; and if by thy Spirit thou wilt speak, when thou workest none shall let it. Oh, speak the comfort of the Gospel to the souls of such this day. And do thou prevent careless, presumptuous professors from hardening themselves with comforts to which they have no right, though they are so ready to snatch them. However, though God only can create your peace, ye mourners, take a word of advice: Endeavour to shake off your bonds, heartily to trust in Jesus Christ, and to wait patiently for him: do not give way to those thoughts which encourage your bondage: refuse not to see the evidences of your own sincerity, when they appear: use yourselves to such encouraging thoughts of God as those I have this day set forth; and the Lord in his time will comfort you.

4. Lastly. Those who are *rejoicing, and esta-*

blished in this Divine goodness, will of all others need the least to be said to them. Take two words, however: Study to be humbly thankful all your days, and imitate your Father in your whole conduct toward your fellow-creatures.

SERMON VIII.

HAPPINESS NOT TO BE MEASURED BY POSSESSIONS.

LUKE xii. 15.

A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

HAPPINESS is the great object of all men. Whatever our character and station be, in this we all agree, to long passionately for happiness, and that with the same sincerity with which we love ourselves. In this the saint and the sinner unite; and that which the one expects in the exercise of the means of grace, the other seeks in the indulgence of proud, worldly, or sensual affections. The world we live in is full of vigour, business, and employment: we are all seeking happiness, though we differ in our ideas of its nature, and of the means which tend to promote it. Is not happiness a great word? Is such a thing to be found? Are we not all of us more or less unhappy at present? Is there a certain way, and only one certain way, which leads to happiness; to some real degree of it here, to the fulness of it hereafter? Are the thousand other ways

which seem to lead to happiness, pregnant only with ruin and desolation, though they deceive and ensnare the hearts and lives of thousands and tens of thousands? What important questions are these! They deserve serious attention from every one of us. As you wish to be happy, brethren, let me beseech you to attend to some directions on this point. Would you wish to feel, to enjoy, to ensure for ever, that jewel of happiness which all seek for, all passionately desire, but which we find ourselves continually frustrated in? The Scriptures of truth, which reveal the way of salvation by Jesus Christ, do thereby recite to us the way of true happiness. The most important subject in the world is before us; the Lord deliver us from a slumbering spirit, and awaken us to lively attention!

Our Lord is guarding men against covetousness: "for a man's life," says he, "consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." It is a very good reason that men should not be urgent after wealth, because their life consists not in it. The satisfaction, comfort, and enjoyment of life, that which makes life valuable, depends not on money.

In doing justice to our subject, it will be proper, then, first, to state what happiness does not consist in; and, secondly, in what it does consist.

1. It does not consist in the abundance of the things which a man possesses.—I doubt not but you are all beforehand with me in

this. There is no man who is not convinced that the quantity of happiness is not at all to be estimated by the quantity of money a man is possessed of. No one fancies that he who is worth only fifty thousand pounds, is on that account but half as happy as he who is worth a plum; or supposes that the man of four hundred a-year commands twice as much enjoyment as he whose rental amounts only to half the sum: yet, so depraved in this respect is the taste of mankind, so horribly has the Fall infatuated us, that it is evident mankind in general are hunting after money as the one thing needful to make them happy. The use of that common word, interest, and the sense which it bears in common acceptation, demonstrate this. When it is said, 'this is for our interest,' 'that is against our interest,' in common discourse, the general meaning is, 'this way I shall get money,' 'that way I shall lose it.' What does this shew, but that men in their hearts, even in spite of their judgments, do yet measure happiness by money? Yet let the intrinsic value of money be considered, and what is there in it? So much as may procure meat and drink and lodging and raiment, and whatever is needful to render life comfortable, and supply the demands of nature, it is reasonable to desire: when money has done this, it has answered its end. Yet happiness lies not there; the soul of man cannot be fed this way, though the body

may; and unless the better part of man be fed, he must remain unhappy. However, let money and possessions be praised for what they are: under God, the all-bountiful Giver, they remove certain uneasinesses, and supply certain wants. But what is to be thought of him, who, after having attained these things over and over, is still as anxious, as discontented, as eager for more, as if he were ready to starve for want? In what sense can he talk of advancing his interest still by gaining more money? Is it that he may do good with it? That, under the regulation of grace, were the noblest use of gain. But conscience must, if not totally seared, testify against him, this is not his object, not his design. The more he gets, the less he gives. Cares and incumbrances, like waves upon waves, shake his inmost soul as he grows richer; and pride, and self-conceit, and a thousand more evils, increase with the increase of his money. He certainly feels much torment from the increase of his possessions; but it is not proper at all to say, that his interest is advanced. Let him shew one single thing in which his enjoyment is increased; for, whatever happiness consists in, it must be in something that is enjoyed in the mind: otherwise happiness has no existence. Money, it is clear, does not this, but much the contrary, to those who are anxious to gain more than a competency. The absurdity is high indeed, that this covetous spirit increases with age:

this shews it a perfect madness. What account can be given of it? I am sure no reasonable one: and when he dies, all is gone, all for ever gone; and it only remains to be told in a newspaper, Such an one died worth so much money —worth the same that the poorest beggar is worth, mouldering clay, food for worms and reptiles! And is this he who always followed his own interest? Let it never be said; for, by placing his heart on gain, he missed of true bliss, and, alas! must miss of it for ever!

2. It is high time that we now consider, secondly, what happiness does consist in. And while I attempt to describe it according to God's word, I hope I shall not be misunderstood, as if I meant to direct you all to neglect the business of the world, and cloister yourselves with monks and hermits. No: the world's business must in a certain degree be attended to. The point is, what has your heart? Attend to the world's affairs; but be loose, moderate, easy, concerning their process, as fleeting things, and at best necessary only for a little time, like the scaffolding of a building, or a temporary bridge, which no one thinks of ornamenting or decking with much anxiety. Happiness lies in something that is not worldly, and it ought to be pursued with all the earnestness of the soul. What that something is, let us endeavour to investigate a little. I beseech you weigh whether it may not be fairly represented thus.—

Let any man examine his own feelings, when he is alone, composed, and undiverted by the world's busy process of affairs, and he will find, he must find, if he pay any attention to what naturally passes within him, that nothing worldly can satisfy the desires of his soul. The intellectual faculty, even in persons of the meanest parts and attainments, cannot rest in matter; it hungers after something spiritual. At the same time, any one who pleases may convince himself that he is not sufficient for his own happiness; that he is not master of that food which will fill the soul; nor can he acquire it by all his resources. This is the reason that, even in full health and prosperity, many, when alone, feel an uneasy vacancy, and are miserable they know not why. The greater part of mankind, unaffected with the Fall, which robbed us of the true jewel of happiness, and strangers to their own concernment in it, poorly seek to fill this vacancy by business or amusement, or both. Were it not for these, they would be at a total loss. But surely mankind should know that these are only temporary expedients, like the palliatives of a malignant disorder which will give way to no remedy: still we are miserable, still we are indigent. One of the sweetest enjoyments of human life lies in friendship. Certainly he who has a good friend, with a small pittance of money, has far more real interest from this world than he who has thousands

without a friend. That word, interest, is so prostituted to the sordid purposes of covetousness, that mankind seem to have no idea of interest but as connected with lands or with money. Those who are swallowed up in the world's affairs, and whom long habit hath trammelled into universal selfishness, have hardly any idea of the pleasures of friendship, —the most innocent, it may be, and valuable, of any that the world can give. But all natures are not so mean and base: there is in some minds a natural generosity and elevation, which can taste something that looks like happiness in friendship; and I will confidently affirm thus far, that true happiness must lie only in friendship. But I go further. If all the idea of friendship be of an useful friend, by whom I can promote my own interest, in the vile sense in which the word interest is generally used, and which has been reprobated already, this is not friendship, but selfishness. But some generous minds (for, though the Fall be universal, there still remains a natural generosity in some) can feel the pleasure of disinterested friendship, or pure love. They are delighted with a friend, as such: his excellencies of understanding and conduct are in themselves very valuable in their eyes. Yet it is evident that all men are so imperfect, so liable to mistakes and infirmities, and, above all, to death, that the jewel of happiness cannot lie in a human friend. Let human friendships, in

subordination to God, be cultivated; but the friendship of God is the jewel of happiness. Mark it, fellow-creatures! to have converse with the Almighty as a friend, this is happiness. "God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever:" "I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." "My joy shall be in the Lord:"—not merely rejoicing in blessings that come from God, but rejoicing in God himself—the Lord our portion. And consider: He who made us is the author of all the pleasure derived to us from his works: how exquisitely, then, can he himself fill us with bliss! It is by his Spirit that he does this, bringing us into union with himself. He who has his real Spirit in this life, has the foretaste of true happiness: the perfection of it, without interruption, he will attain hereafter.

And see how God has graciously provided for this union. Hear it, O earth! and be astonished, O heavens! that men should be so backward and cold in receiving it. God was manifest in our flesh, and bone of our bone! In that nature, by his own bitter sufferings he removed the great obstacle to this union—guilt;—and it is in the view of this transaction that his love is particularly evinced, and his friendship is most amazingly endeared. And now even unconverted men, with whom the happiness of life miserably consists in the abundance of what they possess, may form a shadowy idea of the nature of happiness as it is enjoyed by

the saints of the Most High. It cannot be denied, without much arrogance, that God Almighty can, if he pleases, communicate his Spirit to men. When he does so, there arises what in Scripture is called "the light of God's countenance," "supping with Christ, and Christ with us," "the love of God shed abroad in the heart," and the like. The saints have in this a discovery of the goodness and glory of God in Christ. They see him a Friend; the very nature of him to be love. The only bar to their enjoyment of him is guilt and their unworthiness. The sacrifice of Christ, and his infinite righteousness, effectually remove this. Slavish fear is taken away when this is duly understood and believed. Then follows an intimacy with him, cultivated from time to time in public ordinances; but most enjoyed by thriving saints, and by them most when alone. Christ though unseen, speaks to their hearts from his word. He speaks with power. A constant intercourse is kept up between them. There is a reverential subjection to his authority as their God and their King; and obedience to his commands is the only way in which happiness can be enjoyed: but this is perfectly consistent with friendship; and it is a real intimate friendship, compared in Scripture to that between a husband and a wife. Those who do reverence and fear him, should learn also, by faith in his blood, to obtain an intimacy with him, which shall give them the hap-

piness they seek after. He is thus to be found by them that seek him. Oh what can you conceive wanting here for bliss! If happiness must lie in friendship or love, here is God Almighty made man for us, redeeming us by his own blood: God is love indeed. Does a friend of great wisdom and understanding delight us? here is the wisdom of God; and he is faithful, and everlasting, and almighty. Nor does his immense greatness lessen at all the idea of intimacy: for he is perfect Man as well as perfect God. By his Spirit he unites all believers to himself, and in the world to come they shall be united to him in body as well as in soul. Who can tell the delights, the endearments, of this intimacy! Conceive, if you can, a possible idea of happiness beside this, which is purely scriptural, the enjoyment of God manifest in flesh as a friend. Let him who knows what is the pleasure of friendship with a tender, faithful, generous, and kind friend on earth, conceive the pleasure of such a friendship with Christ, where almighty power secures the fulness and perpetuity of the bliss, and human sympathy allows all the intimacy of brothers—of brothers, too, who have both felt adversity in the flesh. Surely, in such a friendship, with such a Friend, there is happiness.

But it was not my design to leave with you a cold speculation without moving your hearts. As the love of money and earthly possessions is one of the greatest bars to this spiritual friend-

ship, I shall speak a word or two by way of exhortation, and conclude.

O men of this world, ye have long toiled in vain, and are yet miserable! Ye act as if the life of man consisted in the abundance of the things which he possesses. It has been the business of this discourse to shew that happiness consists not in this, and also to shew in what it does consist. Well does St. Paul call covetousness idolatry; for that dependence and adherence which saints place in God, you place in money: that is your god, your portion. Your soul is starving even amidst the greatest gains. Losses and disappointments can make you miserable, but gains and profits cannot make you happy: so that you labour under a constant disadvantage; you are sure to be miserable: and death will soon tear your god from you. O how reluctant are you to part with it! Your hard hands cannot part with a little glittering trash now, to relieve the necessitous: but the hard hand of death will soon strip you of all; and how miserable then your immortal spirit! Stripped of all, you must appear before God with the guilt and curse of all this idolatry upon you, and pine away for ever in misery under his frowns. To gain a friend is far more valuable than all your gains: the soul of man was made for friendship. Dirty acres and shining ore are not this friendship. There can be no true enjoyment, surely, in inanimate things; and your

selfish spirits are incapable even of relishing the pleasures of earthly friendships. But as your friend I speak these things, not to upbraid, but to warn you. Think of your wretchedness; be humbled under your vileness; awake from your dream; and seek for God more than for silver, and search for him more than for hid treasures. This day the object of happiness, God, who can fill the soul with his love—even God made manifest in human nature, thus stooping to your friendship, and endearing himself to you by his bleeding wounds, to shew you the heinousness of your idolatry, and the full redemption from it also—offers to be found of you. O seek him, and turn away your eyes from those vanities which you follow, to the living God. Consider, it must be a woful thing to your souls to be desolate and friendless for ever. They are dead things, mere idols, wind, and vanity, on which you set your hearts: hear the voice of the Son of God, and rest not till you are acquainted with him by his Spirit. He will pour out his Spirit unto you, he will make known his words unto you. I have authority, as a messenger of the Lord of Hosts, to invite you to his friendship. Refuse not him that speaketh; but seek him with all your hearts, till he speak the peace of God unto your souls, and unite you to himself in friendship. Be wise in time, and be happy in eternity.

Ye also, more generous minds, who condemn

the sordid miser, and relish the charms of human friendships, seek a better friend than an earthly one; else your friendships are but idolatrous. Love your earthly friends, but let God have the chief place in your heart. He is well worthy of it who laid down his life for you. You yet want to experience the friendship of Him who has all power and all perfection and all excellencies: who, as God, can fill your souls with good; and, as man, can bless you with sure and everlasting friendship. He solicits, he invites you, by my mouth, to seek his face, and assures you you shall not seek his face in vain.

O Christians, who do know, or have known, Christ Jesus, the sinner's Friend, I fear the love of many of you is waxen cold. This comes from your idolatrous attachment to the world. You have too much of its spirit and taste; the gaining of money is too great an object with you. None can enjoy Christ except they are loose to all things beside him. Consider how you grieve his Spirit and weaken your hands. Seek for close union with him, and heart-felt experience of his friendship. While you do this, avoid the entangling embarrassments of the world. Be content with little: little will serve for nature. Lay up treasures in heaven; and with your whole souls wait for the perfect enjoyment of Him whose loving-kindness is better than life.

SERMON IX.

CHRIST'S KINGDOM NOT OF THIS WORLD.

JOHN xviii. 36.

Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world.

WHOEVER has at all attended to the progress of the Divine life in the soul of man must have observed, that one of its most common and obvious hinderances is the love of this world. Even when a man is favoured with the most pleasant and the most vigorous views of Christ crucified, and feels something of what is meant by his words, "If I be lifted up from the earth I will draw all men unto me," then do the cares or distractions of the world often come in, with great weight and power, and tend to fix him to the earth. In this case, if the Christian is not very much on his guard, he is apt to start aside like a broken bow; and so deceitful is the heart, that it will soon, for the present, lose its liveliness and heavenly direction. He knew this well who prayed, and by his example teaches us to pray in like cases, "My soul cleaveth to the dust: quicken thou me, according to thy word." Prayer and supplication, with watching and perseverance,

are, it is well known to all who have any thing of experimental godliness, the constantly prescribed means of relief and of recovery in such cases. But it is needful for the soul to be well fortified also in clear and strong views of the nature of Christ's kingdom. Many have poor views of this. They make it to be too much of this world. They lose sight of its beauty, and are tempted to stumble at Christ, as soon as they meet with disagreeable crosses in the world. It seems impossible to them to attend to Divine things while these crosses continue; whereas they ought to be then exercising themselves in faith and patience, and labouring to experience the goodness of God in the midst of the crosses, instead of impatiently longing for their removal. For, what if they were removed? Do men then pray more fervently, serve God more sincerely, and bring forth fruit more vigorously? Experience shews they do not. Did David serve God in the fulness of prosperity with that warmth with which he did in the depths of adversity? No. And this is one of the many proofs of man's natural depraved condition, that the state which should engage us the more to serve God in love and thankfulness, tempts us to retire into self-importance, and to forget him and all our obligations to him. It is in adversity especially that God meets the believing soul with sensible, rich, and overpowering grace; and men are brought to feel

that Christ's kingdom is not of this world, when they find, amidst the severest afflictions, the real substance of spiritual enjoyment. And he who has had a little sense of this, will not dread outward afflictions, for he has found that in the season of suffering it is that God visits him most eminently with grace. And indeed it is in this way that Christ's kingdom is proved to a man's experience not to be of this world, since often his enjoyment is the greatest when outward circumstances are the most adverse. And as Christians are to walk by faith, and not by sight, they have great obstructions in doing this, when the objects of sense are the most flattering and the most pleasant, because these draw away the heart from God. On these accounts the knowledge of the maxim of the text is of high importance: "My kingdom is not of this world." It was delivered on a particular occasion, by the Son of God, when he was before Pontius Pilate. And from this its nature he infers that his servants would not fight for him against the Jews: Cæsar, and the powers of the world, need not fear him; his kingdom did not interfere with theirs, but was of a quite different character.

But what was thus delivered on a special occasion, like many other Scripture maxims, has the nature of a general perpetual truth: and it deserves now to be illustrated a little more particularly, that I may, in the next place,

apply the instruction of it for the conviction of the profane, for the exhortation of Christian professors, and for the encouragement of the sincere, especially when in affliction.

I would begin by putting such questions as these: What is the great enjoyment, the true health, and the highest privilege of a real Christian? Is it not, to be drawn to Christ by the cords of his love which passeth knowledge; and to experience the power of his cross in lifting up the mind to heavenly things? And when the mind is filled with the fulness of God, and sees the great things of Christ's salvation, do not worldly things appear little, mean, and worthless? Men favoured with such views attend to ordinary business with diligence, because it is their duty; but they are fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. But now, when we have not steadily before our eyes Christ's kingdom as perfectly distinct from this world, and having its pleasures, its enjoyments, its privileges, its hopes, and its concerns, as quite of a different nature; then worldly avocations and interruptions, either from the flow of prosperity or the damp of adversity, get strong hold on the spirit, and take away the view of Christ, making his kingdom to look like a shadow, a fable, a vapour, a nothing! Think you it was so with primitive Christians burning in the fire for Christ? Worldly things to them appeared trifles, and Christ's kingdom was seen to be the grand reality. And here men may discover whether

they have any thing of that faith "which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." These things are not fancies, humours, conjectures, or even mere reasonings. They will bear reasoning on; and I know nothing more solidly reasonable, and more worthy the attention of reasonable creatures: yet the spirit of Christ's kingdom is above all reasoning; it does for us what no mere reasoning can do,—it brings Divine light and joy into the mind, the living water which satisfies, and such a sensation of felicity as a man wishes only the continuance of to all eternity; and those who know a little of it, and are sensible of much impediment and great burdens, yet are hungering and thirsting thus for righteousness, shall doubtless be filled.

But look now at Christ himself while on earth. His own life and example will shew us clearly the nature of this kingdom. He was not interrupted in his pursuit of heavenly things, in his meat and drink in doing his Father's will, by the pressures of poverty, the thwarting of his enemies, the contradiction of sinners; no, nor by the pains of his sufferings, nor by the prospect of death itself. Let the world rage as it pleases; let Satan do his worst; let calamities on calamities, like waves on waves, roll over his head; all this is of the world: he did not expect happiness from the world, he had other views and objects; he

went on, trusting, expecting, hoping, waiting, enduring, and loving his Heavenly Father; and his enjoyment and his glory was not to be here expected; it was to be in the next world; and at the last day it will be shewn in all its grandeur. May we be found worthy, then, to share even a little of it! Oh! brethren, if ye have believed on him through grace, what *his spirit* is, *that* is *yours also:* you shall sit with him on his throne; you shall be kings and priests with him to God and his Father; and the world and the devil shall be under your feet, as they are already under his. The love and enjoyment of God, with the total destruction of sin, and the right enjoyment of yourselves and of one another, and the whole felicity of man in soul and body, with the faculties and members of each in just and regular perfection, all serving God, and as happy under him as their natures and capacities are capable of—this is something of Christ's kingdom brought to its full establishment.

I know it is a favourite notion with some, that the happiness of Christians in heaven will be always growing to eternity; and it is rather wonderful to me, that any should be so positive in their opinions on a subject upon which we can have no light at all, for the Scripture is doubtless silent on this point. But whether this be the case, or whether the saint shall at the day of judgment be fixed at once in all that happiness which shall be continued for

ever, having then attained the "measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"—from which expression of St. Paul I should rather guess that it will at once attain its perfection, which shall continue the same for ever;—but whether it be this way or that, this is Christ's kingdom, with the world and the lusts thereof passed away, and its whole spirit and power evaporated and for ever gone. And if Christians had their eye always on this, then whatever promoted this in their souls here, they would call prosperity; whatever hindered it, they would call adversity: then blessings would be seen to come to many under the shape of crosses; and many a curse to light on men under the smiling form of a great estate, or high health, or much grandeur. And thus men may see what true happiness is, and what is the way to enjoy it.

And now, in this light we may learn to correct various very common mistakes. When Christ's kingdom flourishes on earth, under a great effusion of the Spirit of God, such as in the Apostles' days, and under various revivals from time to time of Christ's religion in the world, how common is it for sincere souls to expect what they will never find realized here,—to suppose that in time, even in their own time, true religion will prevail over all; to dream about perfectly pure churches here; and even to look for power and greatness in this world, as some have done; when, lo, heresies, scandalous backslidings, providential

disappointments, unexpected crosses and afflictions, spoil the gay prospects, and make them to vanish, like the bright but fleeting colours of the rainbow: all this is no more than what we should expect. And so it is in our own experience: we are on the mount Sion, and foolishly suppose we shall no more have darkness and temptation: but we are again called to conflict. Now if we learn that Christ's kingdom is not of this world, we shall be surprised at none of these things. It was not meant that the glory of the church should appear in outward things. A suffering church, yet trusting and loving and patiently enduring, is infinitely more glorious than an outwardly prosperous one with power and splendour. And these things, well understood, teach Christians, not to fight for religion, but to suffer for it. Grievous mistakes were made during the last century * in these things by professors of godliness: by mistaking Christ's kingdom, as if it were of this world, they exposed themselves to false experience in religion, much hypocrisy, and dreadful delusions; and were imposed on by artful ambitious politicians, of no true religion at all: and we have not yet outlived the reproach which these follies and iniquities have brought on Christ's kingdom. But you may see now a little what is meant by Christ's kingdom being not of this world. Let Chris-

* This discourse was written before the commencement of the present century.

tians learn to go on in the heavenly course without being stopped by the world. What is it to them how the world's kingdom goes on? they move in a different orbit. Let them mind their own course; and in this way they will enjoy in their souls, even here, something of Christ's kingdom, which is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; and doubtless be fitted for its perfection hereafter.

1. And here, in first applying this subject to worldly men—I must call *you* so, who live for this world and not for the next. If your minds were in a fair state for making a just inquiry, it would not be hard for you to know what is meant by living for this world, and to know that such is in truth your real character. You may repeat prayers at certain times, and attend stated worship, and be humane, and attentive to the interests of your families, and be honest men in your dealings; and yet the whole course of your desires be after this world. Men are as their desires are: yours are for this world. Your relish and taste and spirit are set upon it. To enjoy the good things of this life, to make a respectable figure in the world, to leave your children in plentiful circumstances, these are your great objects. And though you may own in words, that all worldly things are nothing worth, if the care of the soul be neglected, yet your practice shews that the soul is not to you the chief object of care. A form of religion, without any heart's delight in it, is all the

religion you know. You do not, when alone, and unmolested with cares and business, employ your thoughts in a heavenly strain; and the conversation and company that you love and regard are of a worldly cast. You admire riches, and great persons, and great things, and you esteem persons of rank as in an enviable state. Inwardly you have a sort of contempt for poor people and persons in low situations: and you follow the fashions of the world; and the great ones, who give law to the fashions, you reverence more than your Maker. If Jesus Christ, whose kingdom is not of this world, were to appear on earth, and appear and act just as he did in the days of his flesh, you would be ashamed of him. He would appear to you a mean, obscure, paltry sort of a character. Great and rich and prosperous persons would attract far more of your notice and reverence; and if *they* persecuted him, *you* would do so too, or at least would take care not to bring yourselves into the least difficulty by espousing his interest. You would ask, "Have any of the rulers believed?" If he would shew you a way how to thrive and grow great in the world, you would attend to him; but his kingdom being quite of another kind, is not for your taste. And you may know how you would treat him, by your manner of treating his people and ways in the world. You never help them in the upholding of Christ's kingdom. You can sit very easy and uncon-

cerned, though his name and ways be despised; and it is no grief of heart to you to see your own children unacquainted with him: provided they do but go on prudently and prosperously for this world, it comes not much into your mind to be careful at all what is to become of their souls hereafter. You go with the stream. You see plainly that persons of your sort are uppermost in the world, have the greatest power and honour on their side; and that persons who walk with Christ, and whose spirit is, like his, not of this world, are fewer in number, of little account in the world, and have not in general the outward marks of greatness and prosperity to be known by: you can therefore despise, or at least neglect them, even though you cannot but inwardly esteem them as the best men on earth. Then you gladly join with the world in supposing the spirit by which they are actuated to have some taint of a weak or distempered brain; and this too against all good reason, when they give no sign of folly but this—if it be folly—that they fear God, live conscientiously, and prefer steadily the interests of the next world to those of this world. To be sure you are blind to the true beauty of the Son of God, and have that in your nature which tempts you to despise him for giving up a kingdom, when he might have had one, and choosing rather to live in poverty. You know you would not do so. There is not any

worldly advantage of money, or connections, or honours, or pleasures, that you would like to let slip. You would strain very hard, but you would reconcile things of this sort to your consciences. Here you see sense, beauty, substance; in religion you are without any true ideas; a kingdom not of this world is to you like a fairy tale.

Be honest, fellow-creatures, and own before God that this is your character, as your conscience tells you. And be assured by all Scripture, that you need a changed heart. If there were not another passage confirming the text, by it you might be assured, that, as Christ's kingdom is not of this world, and your taste is all for this world, he and you do not agree, and can have no fellowship. And which of you must be changed, Christ or you?—for, to bring two persons into a state of perfect union, if they be quite unlike one another at present, one of them must be changed. Be sure Christ is of the same mind still as he was when he refused all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them. You must be changed, then, and changed wholly. Here is the new birth; here is the work of God's Holy Spirit on the heart; here is the power of the atoning blood of Christ to redeem you from the curse, and, applied by faith to your conscience, to draw you with the cords of love to heaven. See, then, what you have to do, and repent and believe the Gospel; so shall you find what

Christ's kingdom means, and at length enjoy your share of it.

2. Ye who profess the doctrines and ways of the Lord Jesus, who see, and long in any measure to enjoy, what is meant by being drawn to Jesus; you see what a strong drawing there is the contrary way, from the spirit of the world. It is natural to us all: and Christ's kingdom will not at all mix with it. It is the most steady and the most common enemy in our day to the spirit of true religion. You should not go on complaining of it, and yet indulging it: you should count the cost, and give up the world entirely—in this sense, that it shall no longer govern you. I dare not promise you that the world will use you better if you do so; probably it will use you worse. Men of wide and convenient consciences, who make compliances without end, and shift and change, and always take care to be on the strongest side, and who have no ground of their own to stand on, may doubtless avoid many crosses; and though, such is the power of conscience, even those whom they strive to please cannot esteem them in their hearts like the real children of God, yet they will behave better to them, be fonder of their company, associate with them, and countenance them openly in the world, while they are ashamed of real Christians. It is great ignorance of human nature to suppose, that the better men are, the more friends they will have, and the more

kindness they will receive in the world. On the contrary, men who live in the fear of God provoke the world by their example, by the testimony they are obliged to give against sin, and by thwarting the wicked in their unreasonable desires and pursuits. They *must* do this, even while they wish and act in the most charitable manner to all mankind. What is a little money, or present ease, or the good-will of bad men (even if rich and great), to them, compared with the law of rectitude and a good conscience? Hence, as the world prevails, and is stronger, it commonly happens that the best and wisest men suffer, and miscarry very often in their pursuits: and those who measure every thing by this world, think them fools; but they count the cost, and can patiently wait till the last Judgment-day adjusts all accounts with equity.

And so commonly is this the case, that even in Heathen countries, men of remarkable integrity, though great and wise men, have suffered very sorely in this world. I take notice of two particularly, Socrates and Cicero. I am not setting them up as Christians; far from it, they had essential defects in their plan; yet, compared with men of their generation, they were wise and honest men, and laid themselves out all their days to profit their country. Yet was the former put to death as a malefactor, and the latter was murdered; and he who betrayed him most basely, even

Augustus Cæsar, lived to an old age in very great prosperity, flattered all his days, and courted and admired in the world. But time would fail to set forth the worldly disadvantages, if you mean to serve God faithfully. Even these honest heathens in a degree suffered for righteousness' sake; but look to your Divine Master, his Apostles, and his followers in all ages, "of whom the world was not worthy." Many are apt to think they can manage so dexterously as to serve Christ and yet avoid persecution; but it is fixed: "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." In this, then, count the cost. You may be a sort of half-professor, and escape; but if you be a thorough honest Christian (though one of the most prudent men in the world, and having the most perfect dislike to real enthusiasm), you will be looked on as silly and weak; and the world, knowing nothing of Divine wisdom, will congratulate itself as being mistress of all true wisdom. Worldly men will have their day: the time is coming when they will appear the most contemptible in folly.

Will you follow Christ on these terms? be content to be thought weak and simple, and meet with hard treatment, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake? Then get your minds well fortified with the subject this day spoken to. Think deeply of what is meant by Christ's kingdom being not of this

world: for if you expect that by and bye you shall live to see the Gospel uppermost, and its glory and grandeur prevailing in this world, you will be disappointed. Aim at right views of heavenly riches, of real spiritual blessings, of the solid excellency of true faith, of unshaken patience, of the love of Jesus Christ, and of the rest which remains for the people of God hereafter; of the crown of glory, which in the sight of all the world his people shall then wear; and of their never-ending solid felicity. These things, under God, will encourage you to proceed, and will prevent mistakes: you will be led to follow Christ, not in a sudden heat, but with deliberate judgment; and, as our Saviour recommends, having counted the cost. And the world will one day see, whether you or they have been the best calculators, and who are the solid and judicious persons, and to whom belongs the palm of wisdom. For now, O followers of Christ, who love him in sincerity, who abound in sanctified works, who honour God and do good to men in all that you do, doubtless your choice is that of wisdom itself. Divine wisdom enlightened you and disposed you to choose thus, and Divine grace will comfort and support you through all your trials. You see the world a cheat, a bubble, a phantom, a vapour. Oh! have but a little patience, and endure a little longer, and the bubble will burst and be no more. You have the satis-

faction to carry the cross of Christ, and ere long shall share in his crown. You suffer with him, and soon shall reign with him. His blood alone gives you peace here, and his Spirit will conduct you safe into his heavenly everlasting mansions.

SERMON X.

MARKS OF SPIRITUAL DECAY.

GAL. iv. 15.

Where is then the blessedness ye spake of?

WHEN men have been shewn the way of happiness; have enjoyed it in their souls for a time; and, after having known it, do forsake it, and turn to vain things which cannot profit nor deliver; they may well be addressed as these Galatians are by the zealous and charitable Apostle, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth?" and in the text, "Where is, then, the blessedness ye spake of?" What, is it come to this? You, who once rejoiced so much in the Gospel, who found so much blessedness in it, and declared that you never knew before what blessedness was, are you weary of happiness? Strange, that men should grow tired of their own felicity! Has the Gospel lost its power of comforting and filling the soul? or, rather, are not you beguiled by some accursed enemy or deceit, and lost your relish, your appetite for it?——Indeed, indeed, there is a necessity for even the most

confirmed Christians to watch unto prayer, and to keep with diligence their own hearts. The heart is most deceitful, and the case of the Galatians shews it. They were not turned back to professed heathenism: Jupiter, and Mercury, and the other false gods, had no more of their worship: Christ they respected still; and there is no reason to doubt but in words they owned him as the Saviour, and his blood they professed to trust in as the ransom-price for their sins. But they were seduced by Satan and false teachers, to trust in circumcision—just as among ourselves some, it is to be feared, trust in baptism, and others in the Lord's Supper—for salvation, in the room of Christ. It is our duty, brethren, to warn you, that you be not high-minded, but fear.

I am speaking to the people of God, and my business in this discourse will be chiefly with them. Ah! how easily is the precious faith of the Gospel, which makes Christ our all, sullied, obscured, and defaced! It is a precious light from heaven; but all the powers of nature and of Satan are against it. And indeed, though we have often espoused you to one husband, even Christ, yet have we reason to fear of many, that their minds are corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. In fact, there is a deadness, a coldness—not an absolute falling away, but a decay—observable among us. More causes than one may have contributed to produce this effect. The Lord make us sen-

sible of it! It ought to be an alarming thing: and one great proof of the decay is, that many can feel the symptoms of it, and yet never exert themselves vigorously to remedy the evil. To consider, then, this subject in some method, I would, first, briefly remind you of the nature of that blessedness which once was among us, and of which many hearts were conscious; secondly, touch upon some instances of the decay; concluding with a word of exhortation.

1. And, first, what the blessedness was.—You remember—there are of you who do—what agitation of mind, what vehement desire, what thirst after knowledge, what longing, unutterable longing, for we scarce knew what, but for something we were not in possession of, there was among us. We deeply felt that without Christ formed in us, in a sense widely different from the mere notion and form of things in which we were brought up, we must be miserable for ever. For the alarmed conscience wanted peace and rest in Christ, not in our own righteousness: we found that we needed this, and yet in ourselves we were without strength to obtain it. It pleased God to shew us the way of justification before him; that what we never could find in ourselves, was in Christ Jesus made ready to our hand, wanting only to be made our own by faith. Thus we preached Christ crucified, labouring to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To have

"Christ formed in you," as the Apostle divinely speaks to these Galatians, who had lost their relish for him, and were falling off from the true way of justification by him, this was our labour: and, ever adored be God, it was not in vain. The words of God were found, and you did eat them, and they were the joy and rejoicing of your hearts. Thus the garment of praise was given for the spirit of heaviness, and the oil of joy for mourning. Troubled censciences were set at liberty to run the way of God's commandments, in love, through faith in the atoning blood. Oh, brethren, you then knew what blessedness was; for the foundation of it certainly lies in pardon of sins: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." You had joy and peace in believing, and some real degree of knowledge in yourselves that you had in heaven a better and an enduring substance. From union with Jesus flowed communion. It was no presumption: it was the confidence of true faith, joined with deep humiliation of soul. You beheld Jesus as your brother, your husband, your portion, and your all; and through him, as the centre of union, you learnt true love, love of God and of man. You had the earnest of heaven in your souls; and it might in some degree be said here, as it was said of old, "the disciples were of one heart and one of soul." These things excited the hatred and envy of the wicked.

Much contempt and much bitterness were stirred up against the faithful followers of Jesus. But we were willing to suffer shame for the name of Jesus: we counted little of worldly things: Christ was All among us; and we pitied and prayed for the despisers of the Gospel, but courted not their favour.

This is a short and simple sketch of our blessedness; but are not things much decayed with us? I hope not to so great a degree as to provoke the Lord to remove our candlestick; but decayed they surely are: they may be amended through grace, but we should labour to become sensible of the decay. Some have happily kept all their first love to Christ; but I fear the instances are but rare. That we may be deeply sensible of the fact, and not go on keeping one another in countenance in a half-earnest way of religion, let us,

2. Observe, as I proposed secondly, some instances of decay. I shall just mention five. The five instances I shall speak a word to are, meditation, love, conversation, humility, and heavenly-mindedness.

(1.) "My meditation shall be sweet," says the Psalmist. How is it with us now, in that respect? How was it—recollect, brethren—how was it with us formerly in that respect? Was it not pleasant to you often to be alone? Did you not seek opportunities for privacy and retirement? And when alone, and no eye saw you, but the Eye which seeth all things, what

was the bent and taste and turn of your minds? Was not communion with Jesus exceedingly agreeable to you? Did you not say, with Thomas, "My Lord and my God?" Did you not pour out your souls affectionately in prayer, and lay your wants before him; and was it not in a free, familiar, intimate, yet reverent and humble manner, as to your best and dearest Friend, yet also as to the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity? Was it not then sweet to you, to "receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, and to reign in life with him?" Worldly care!—did you not cast it on him, as the helpless babe looks to the fond mother for support? Guilt and transgressions!—did you not come to the Fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, and did he not speak peace to your souls through his blood? Had you then any desire after worldly pleasures and delights? Were not trifling cares and concerns like so many thieves and robbers, that wanted to deprive you of your dearest enjoyments? "O how sweet are thy words to my mouth; yea, sweeter than honey to my taste!" The views of justification, adoption, and the offices and sufferings of Jesus, his Divine character and excellencies—were not these the theme of your meditation? And Scripture promises were then exceeding great and precious to your souls; and the hope of a blessed resurrection to eternal life sweet-

ened every care, and made all trouble sit light on your spirits.

But now, do not many find it is not so pleasant for them to be alone? Meditation and prayer are like a task and a burden, not a delight and a pleasure. So you restrain prayer; are rather glad to find excuses to omit it, or to shorten it. You have nothing, as it were, to say to the Saviour; all is coldness, languor, and deadness. Thus you are less and less alone. To be in the world, amidst its bustling concerns, or to trifle away the time in frivolous company and conversation, this best suits your present taste. Yet are you uneasy as you are. God be praised! he will not part with you thus. He hedges up your way with thorns. He desires to convince you, that he himself must be your portion; that he himself deserves the best place in your thoughts and meditations. Let me advise and entreat you whom these things may suit, to oblige yourselves daily to take time for private reading the word, meditation, and prayer. No matter however dull, heartless, wandering, and backward, go on, press forward in it. You may wait till you be hardened, and brought into such a state—— one can scarce say what a stupid state you may be brought to. This is what I would say, with all the vehemence that I can express, and beyond what I know how to express:—Closet duties are the life and soul of religion. Attend

to them more than has been done. Public means of grace, though you may attend them ever so often, will not bless, will not enrich, will not comfort you, if you do not digest what you hear in private, and lay out your whole souls in dealing with God at a throne of grace. This is the reason that so many, I fear, have gone on for years, approving as it were the Gospel, yet coming to nothing. They do not examine whether they themselves be in the faith. Their spiritual matters are brought to no sound issue. There is a grievous want, perhaps there has always been a great defect, among us in this particular. Ah! in company, when men are excited by seeing and hearing one another, it is more easy for people to feel themselves affected in religion—and perhaps all in a wrong way, from pride, ostentation, or a love of praise. Some may say, This is hard judging. Brethren, we are to suggest what may be for your profit, not for your pleasure, wishing your souls to thrive. But there is an easy way for you to try yourselves in this thing: see how the same godly thoughts and views affect you when alone. If you are comforted and affected after a godly sort in private meditation, you have reason to believe your religious affections in public were of a truly Christian nature.

To close this head: Let private meditation be attended to, as the grand means of revival. If it be still neglected, whatever else I may say, or

whatever else may be done, will I fear be of little avail. But yet there are other heads that should be attended to.

(2.) Love is the life and soul of Christianity: it is its perfection and its glory. When the doctrine of justification was first preached among you, and received in contrite and believing minds, O what love did it produce to God our Saviour, to one another, to all men! This made us to be as one body, influenced by one soul: for we all drew life out of one Saviour, and lived by faith on one Head; having the same enemies and conflicts, and one hope of glory. But is not this bond of union much relaxed among us? The Apostle gives an instance of it in the Galatians. Their love had been very fervent: "I bear you record," says he, "that, if it had been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and have given them to me." A decline in faith and spiritual understanding, which had taken place among them, was attended with a decline of love. Therefore I reckon the doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus to be in this respect the master doctrine. When truly learnt in its power and sweetness, it knits men's hearts to God in love, and to one another. In the right reception of it, Christ is formed in us: this is the "blessedness" of the text. And men who have lost the power of it, may well be asked, "Where is the blessedness ye spake of?" The happiness and joy of it dispose men cer-

tainly to love peculiarly their ministers, whom God has made the instruments of their blessedness. The love of the Galatians to Paul was strong; he expresses it in strong terms: and surely I can bear record to an affection not unlike it among ourselves. But whether this Divine love be now what it was among us, judge ye, beloved brethren. "If ye bite and devour one another, take heed ye be not consumed one of another." Remember the dismal fall of the Galatians. Is there not something like it in our case? Is there that kindness and affection toward your pastors, and toward one another, that once there was? You may judge as well as I here: I say no more: I leave it to your consciences.

(3.) In conversation, too, is not the decay sadly evident? It was once the business of saints, when they met together, to talk of the things of God, and to promote godly conversation. The heart was kept with more diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. If that be neglected, the tongue fails of its best office, to glorify God. Trifling, levity, jesting, and often, what is worse, scandal and censoriousness; and (what a great light, now with God, once said) a talking about religion, rather than religion itself, engrosses men's minds and conversation. Weigh, brethren, how things are with us here; and let it be remembered, to quicken us, that for every idle word men must give an account at the day of judgment.

(4.) And is there, think you, that blessed poverty of spirit among us, with the commendation of which our Lord begins his sermon? Do we feel the plague of our own hearts? Does sin appear heinous in our eyes? When we talk of our own sins, is it not too often in a light, careless spirit, and not with that sorrow which true mourners feel? Oh, cultivate humility: get acquainted with Jesus, to make you poor, and low, and contrite in spirit: and look to Him whom you have pierced, and mourn.

(5.) The fifth and last symptom of decay, is the loss of heavenly-mindedness; and, in proportion to that, the prevalence of a worldly spirit. There was once among us, in taste, spirit, dress, and many particular things that might be mentioned, a greater difference between the people of God and of the world than now there is. It is hard to say, of many persons, where their religion is, they are so like the people of the world. The difference ought to be strong, legible, and plain. Let every day shew it—"*that* man is a Christian;" "*that* woman is not of this world, but is for the next." Thus in a meditative, loving, humble, heavenly temper, it were well if the world could see us excelling. It is so in some: I wish it were plainer in all who profess the Gospel.

And now, lastly, suffer, dearly beloved, the word of exhortation. Be warned in time. Do not content yourselves with a transient serious thought or two; or go about complaining how

wrong things are with you, and resting the matter there. Some can go on in this half-earnest, hypocritical way for years. In short, try to amend: set yourselves about it this day: defer it not. Meditate more frequently, and pray in private. Cultivate love to God, your pastors, and the brethren. Say, where is the blessedness you once partook of? Rouse yourselves to seek it again. Seek to be humbled. Guard your tongues: and break off from the spirit of the world, lest its flatteries hurt you more than its frowns ever did. But come to Christ first for all. Take up fresh strength from him. He knocks at the door; let him in. Let him be formed in you. If you can believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.

SERMON XI.

THE PHARISEE ADMONISHED.

MATT. xxiii. 26.

Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

THE meek and charitable Lamb of God throughout this chapter expresses himself with prodigious vehemence and severity against the Pharisees. As none of his discourses are in vain, as all are recorded for our instruction, I shall not dwell so much on the ancient Pharisee as on the modern. And as I conceive the advice of the text may be singularly useful, both for the direction of unconverted and converted persons, I shall apply it to each distinctly —first, to the unconverted; and secondly, to the converted;—pointing out in each, as I can, the cases to be spoken to, and addressing them accordingly.

1. In speaking to the unconverted, I am, then, to address a blind Pharisee, one altogether so. And yet he is not without religion, any more than the ancient Pharisees were; but his religion is all false and vain; and, as he

manages it, provoking to the Lord, instead of being acceptable to him. If this man ever be undeceived, he must be shewn in what his error lies, and he must undergo the mortification of finding himself wrong even in those things in which he glories.

The Pharisees among the Jews were men who bore the fairest characters, and had the greatest ascendency and influence among the people. In all things, where character was concerned, they were solicitous to save appearances. They paid tithe of mint, anise, and cummin; but omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. This their minute attention to little things, and their gross neglect of greater things, our Lord compares to the straining at a gnat, and swallowing a camel; and to the cleansing the outside of the cup and platter, and leaving the inside full of filth and uncleanness: and hence he leads them in the text to the true wisdom: "Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also." But we are not to suppose that all these Pharisees were men totally void of conscience and principle. Too much, indeed, of this attention to appearances, and neglect of the fear of God, there was, or might be, among them all. Ostentation, and the thirst of worldly honours and greatness, were common among them; and some might have little else in them but covetousness

and worldly-mindedness. But many of them (as St. Paul bears witness of the Jews, with a special eye to that sect, we may suppose, of which he was one) had a zeal for God, though not according to knowledge. They meant to be religious. Even in their enmity against true Christians, they meant to do God service, as our Lord bears them witness. That idea of Pharisaism, then, or those Pharisaic characters who were altogether hypocrites, in the grossest sense, and had no inward religious principle at all, only the mere pretence of it, enter not into in this discourse. That they are most detestable, all men see. But those who, with something of this hypocrisy, had also some religious zeal and desire to save their souls; these were perhaps the most numerous Pharisees, both of that and of every age: men who not only deceive others, but themselves. There is a superficial and slight way of judging, which persons unsuspicious of the human heart, and unacquainted with themselves, are apt to fall into. They think all wicked men must know themselves so to be; and make no allowances for that deceitfulness of the heart, of which so much is said in Scripture. It is to be feared they this way deceive themselves: their consciences do not tell them of their own corrupt and Pharisaic state, and therefore they conclude they are not so. By this mark of the text,—attention to outward things, and neglect of inward purity,—you

may, however, see the character of a Pharisee in every age, and men should learn to know themselves. This, then, is the spirit of a Pharisee, belonging to all Pharisees, ancient and modern:—Supposing him to have a concern for his soul, he lays the great stress of duty on outward observances: Whatever religious denomination he be of, he acquaints himself with the excellencies, real or imagined, of that sect or denomination he belongs to: if he is a Churchman, his zeal is strong for the rites of the Church, and his contempt for all out of the pale of the Establishment is high and inveterate. The real love of God and his neighbour, the real knowledge of God and his covenant, and an heartfelt acquaintance with his Son Jesus Christ, are cold and slight matters to him: hence, in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, he does not examine what views he has had of Christ; what lively discernment of him by faith; what approaches to him in confidence, humility, reverence, and love; what contrition and humiliation of soul for his sins; what sensations of joy, peace, gratitude, and thanksgiving; and what lasting fruits and effects these things have had on his conduct—these inward things, this inside of the cup and platter, is all unknown to him;—but, how decently he behaved; with what attention he heard, and repeated responses; with what exactness he went through the quantity of reading with which that great supporter of Pharisaism, "the

Week's Preparation," supplied him. In the duty of almsgiving his heart is the same: he will consider who knows the alms he gave, and what a great quantity he gave considering his circumstances; and he will please himself also, if he felt pity in his heart to the wretched object—(This affection is right indeed; that is, we should feel pity for the distressed, but not think ourselves virtuous for it: it is an amiable instinct, it is no more;)—but whether he gave what he gave to Christ; how far he felt the love of Christ constraining him in what he did; this he values not, nor lays any weight on.

I have mentioned the sacrament and almsgiving; for these two—the one, as being supposed to contain our duty to God; the other, to our neighbour—are the distinguished idols of Pharisees at this day. Other particulars need not be mentioned: they act in all other things as they do in these two. And if there be any Dissenters here present, let none of them exult: Pharisaism is a common weed in the rank soil of human nature, and grows among them as well as among Churchmen. It behoves every one to see whether he do not cleanse the outside of the cup and platter, and neglect that which is within, his heart. And it is observable, if the consciences of Pharisees be distressed, it is generally about frivolous, outward, or at least subordinate matters: and when they have done such and such things—for instance, said their prayers so often, or

read so much—then they make their consciences easy: but how they felt inwardly in praying or reading, and what the state of their affections is, that they regard not. A ceremony is of more consequence with them than the regulation of the heart. Malice and censoriousness cost them no pangs of conscience; but the omission of a trifling custom in religion of no moment would make them uneasy. In general, much pains a blind Pharisee may take to no useful purpose at all. He has no foundation. His heart is wrong altogether, having no faith in God, no love of his Maker, no delight at all in heavenly things. It is to no purpose that such a person asks whether it be lawful to do or to omit such and such things, and hopes there is no great harm in his indulging and diverting himself in such and such a way. What signifies it to his soul's interest, how he proceeds in these things, while his heart is far from God, and means to continue so all the time? Even if he do nicely employ himself in some matters of "mint, anise, and cummin," he acts only like a man who should undertake to build a house, and, instead of laying a foundation, and proceeding on a regular plan, should give himself entirely to the curious cutting and ornamenting of a stone with the chisel. How ridiculous, should he continue to boast that he was building apace, and should finish by and bye! As ridiculous, and infi-

nitely more ruinous, is the blind Pharisee's labour in religion.

The case being by this time so clearly laid down that you cannot miss of its application, it seems high time to apply to the blind Pharisee the advice of the text; "Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also."

Do you mean to be saved? Are you in earnest to gain the favour of God? See, at any rate, that this be your case first. If it be not; if what you do in religion be only matter of amusement, or habit, or education, or for the praise of men; all advice while you so continue will be lost upon you. If you are in earnest, remember, you must get into quite a different way from your present one. It is not this or that particular thing that wants amending; you want an universal change. Your heart is bad; so is that of all men by nature. You never felt yet the plague of your own heart. To lop off a few topmost branches of a poisonous tree, is doing nothing, while the root and stock remain. When Peter exhorts the Jews, who were pricked to the heart and asked what they must do, he bids them repent—that is, change their minds altogether;—and in the next chapter, "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." You fancy your hearts are good, and your state right in the

main, only there are some particular matters that want rectifying; and you labour at this or that point; and you take fruitless pains for years, and are just as unholy as ever you were. It is the alteration of your whole state and plan that is required. Let me beg your attention to the following directions and remarks.

(1.) Desire and labour to be convinced of your entire guilt and depravity. Let the great fundamental doctrine of original sin come with weight on your consciences. See your own part in it; that the account given in Scripture of the fall and misery of man suits you; and that what you say in this house from time to time, "There is no health in us," is true of you in particular. Get a heart-affecting sense of this from the Spirit of God. Know that the law requires the obedience of the heart; and that even in those instances in which you have obeyed, as well as in those in which you have disobeyed, you are guilty, because quite void of that love which is the fulfilling of the law.

(2.) Knowing yourselves lost and guilty, look out heartily for a Deliverer. Desire, by the Spirit's working, to receive Jesus as your Saviour in good earnest; a Saviour to you in particular; to justify you from all your sins, to make you children of God by adoption and grace, to bring you to the right knowledge, love, and fear of God, and to peace and fellowship with him. For this you have need of faith, a living principle, whereby you draw nigh to

God through the blood of Jesus. You no longer hope for heaven from the doing or the not doing of certain things, on which, with the true Pharisaic spirit of self-righteousness, you hitherto laid the whole stress of your soul's acceptance; but, casting away all these dependencies, you learn to be grounded and settled on Christ alone, as a stone, a tried stone, a sure foundation, on which whosoever believeth shall not be confounded. This will bring you to peace. And,

(3.) Hence on this foundation you will build for heaven. Love will give you wings of zealous duty; gratitude will draw you; the Spirit of Christ in you will constrain you with sweetness and with power. Your cases of conscience will be satisfactorily solved by the Spirit of God. A new light will break in upon your steps, and order all your walk; and your heart being purified by faith, and your conscience sprinkled by the blood of Christ, you will find a new heart, a new will, new affections. And that which is within being first cleansed, that which is without will be clean also; your walk will be made heavenly, comfortable, and holy. Thus, by an experimental acquaintance with original sin, justification by faith, and the new birth, you will be brought out of Pharisaism into the spirit and liberty and love of the Gospel.

I advertise you of one thing. If any of my audience see cause to accuse themselves of

mere Pharisaism to this day, and would effectually learn the principles that have been briefly stated, let them know that they are such as the world is pleased to despise as fanatical; and no man can seriously seek to practise the advice of the text, but he must undergo the odious imputation. They are most precious truths; and the experience of real salvation by Jesus, and the real use of him as a Saviour, are the most comfortable things in the world. Nevertheless, you cannot understand them aright, nor have a mind and will suited to them, but from above. It is God's own prerogative to change the heart. You have the more need, therefore, to pray for understanding, and to search the Scriptures with reverence. And do not be offended if you find the path strange, difficult, mysterious, mortifying to flesh and blood, and not easily digested. The false religion you have followed is easy to be digested, it suits corrupt nature: this is above nature; we need a new nature to enter into it aright. But if you persevere in seeking to know yourselves as lost, to know Christ as your Saviour, to walk with him by faith, and to draw every thing out of his fulness, you yourselves shall in this life feel the happy change: you shall find a peace to which you were before strangers, be pleased with a truly heavenly light, and breathe the air of heaven while on earth. You shall find passions and lusts subdued in a way you never could have imagined. You shall look

beyond the grave with comfort: and in the world to come the issue shall be unspeakably glorious. Oh, be persuaded to seek these these things, and know that they are true by your own experience.

2. Nor are the words void of most useful instruction to converted persons; especially those who have once walked with God in the comfort of the Gospel, and have since lost sight of the glory of God, the excellency and suitableness of Jesus Christ, and the nature of true happiness and wisdom. Alas! the taste and frame of the heart is easily dulled and blunted in these things by such a creature as man, and in a world so corrupt as this. And when, brethren, you have not backslidden altogether from God, but are grown dull and faint and languid in your apprehensions of Divine truth, and are discouraged with the sense of guilt and leanness of soul, and many corruptions and temptations, you will find an extreme backwardness to go to God as a covenant God in Christ: the road to him will seem to be blocked up. Some remembrance you may retain of the pleasantness and glory of the way by which you formerly knew peace; but self-righteous pride will suggest that you are not now to come to God as a sinner, nor to treat yourself as one of those who never knew any thing of the ways of God. You will be apt to fancy that you have some stock of grace, and will labour in vain to make some

amends for past ill conduct by future fruitfulness; but, leaning to self and not to Christ, you make poor work of the whole business; your attempts are too feeble, wearisome, and unsavoury to be either useful to yourselves or acceptable to God. You may strive again and again by the works of the law, and yet find, in spite of all your resolutions, that sin gets the better of all your strivings. What is to be done? Consider, that which first gave you peace, light, and strength, must do so again. You want a fresh discovery of the blood of Jesus, a fresh application of that blood to cleanse your conscience. Nothing but the love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost will kindle in you the flame of heavenly love. Strive, then, to attain it. Turn your thoughts and meditations this way. Give over striving in your own strength: it is only cleansing the outside of the cup and platter: you want cleansing within. You are very blind and backward to this, and may be tempted to think what I say to be of little weight; for your bias is now self-righteous; and perverse pride, and the spirit of bondage and hardness of heart, have gained great dominion over you; and, with all this, there frequently lodges an obstinate self-conceit, the remains of corrupted nature, which knows no way of coming to God but with a price in hand of so much virtue, such a quantity of goodness. But you will be far enough from attaining this, till you have

the humility to set yourselves down as poor sinners, and begin afresh with Christ, following his advice to the Laodicean Church. They, as well as you, had lost the humbling sense of their being wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. You must know yourselves such, and take the counsel of the Lamb of God, buying of him gold, white raiment, and eye-salve, as he expresses himself in a well-known passage. When Peter exhorts the Jews, he does not desire them to repent of this or that particular wickedness, and lay the main stress of his discourse on this or that particular point. He might, had he been a mere moral declaimer, have enlarged copiously enough on their cruelty, their covetousness, and their hypocrisy. So the wisdom of man would dictate: and men may this way be lopping off particular branches, and the bitter root of sin remain all the while untouched and unmolested: and many who are fond of this way among ourselves, can read and hear and talk, sometimes of this and that virtue, and against this and that vice. Satan laughs at their self-conceited folly, and knows all the time that he keeps them fast bound in his service; for sin they still serve with all their heart. He and his kingdom flee only before the cross of Christ. There, brethren, there direct your eyes. Better to look there, infinitely better, though it be in much feebleness, than to weary out yourselves in proud essays

of self-righteousness. Your self-confidence wants destroying, your hearts want humbling. You want, as it were, a re-conversion. Your comfort must come in the same way as it did at first. "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." So Peter preached, and preached with power and success, to the Jews; for this is God's own doctrine; his glory and that of his only Son are concerned in it, and he will bless it. You do not want amending in this or that point only; your whole frame and state need an alteration for the better. A renewal of the same light and glorious views of Christ, which relieved and sanctified you at first, must do so again. Nor is there any difference as to your experimental sense of it, though there may be in your real state before God; but as to your experimental sense, there is no difference between your condition now and formerly. Preach to your hearts, then, as Peter did to the Jews; and take the advice of the text, "Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside may be clean also:" for though you are not altogether blind, you are so in a measure, and your backwardness to repent heartily and believe freely in Jesus, is a proof of your blindness and the deceitful power it has over you. And for your encouragement, know that the grace of God was as free to pardon David even after his foul offences, as to justify him at first. Let

this be your encouragement to humble yourselves before the Lord; and seek to experience the virtue of the blood of Christ. Your outward works and ways will, I had almost said, be set right of themselves; at least a little sober attention will easily do it, when all is healed within. "Cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside may be clean also."

And the three great points of Christianity, original sin, justification by faith in Jesus, and the new birth, which I recommended to the attention of the unconverted, do you also condescend to attend to. Those grow the most in real grace, who most vigorously apply themselves all their lives to the practical feeling of the very first fundamental truths of the Gospel. If Christian men had always before them the desperate wickedness and deceitfulness of their hearts, and the abounding, free, all-sufficient grace of Jesus, and the excellency of that new birth unto righteousness which is the effect of his grace, they would walk in virgin simplicity and chastity of mind with their God and Saviour, following the Lamb whithersoever he goeth: and in case of declension, if they returned to these same truths, and applied them closely to their consciences, he would recover them. He will honour his own medicines, and give them success; in so doing he honours himself. Consider, then, what has been said, and the Lord give you understanding in all things.

SERMON XII.

THE LOVE OF CHRIST MUST BE THE SUPREME AFFECTION.

MATT. x. 37.

He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.

Our Lord is speaking of the persecutions and hardships which his faithful followers must endure for his sake. So little disposed are men to receive the very best tidings which ever came to the ears of mankind, that the preachers of the Gospel are exposed to reproach and much ill treatment from the world. "A man's foes shall be they of his own household;" which is no uncommon case even to this day: parents, husbands, wives, and children persecute their nearest relations on account of their love of Christ. He warns us, in this case, how necessary it is that we have the prevailing love of Christ in our souls. However dear father or mother, son or daughter, be, they must not rival Christ in our affections. He deserves more of our love than they: if we cannot enjoy their love in consistence with the

love of Christ, he shews us in the text which ought to give way: that man who loves not Christ above the nearest and dearest relation he has in the world, and by consequence above every other person or thing besides, is not worthy of Christ. So that the doctrine of the text is,—the love of our Lord Jesus Christ ought to be stronger than, and superior to, all other affections in the world.—Let us, first, illustrate a little the nature and excellency of this love of Christ; and then apply it to the consciences of different sorts of persons.

1. The duty of the text is one of those which flow from principles peculiarly Christian: it is such as would never have been known or understood at all, had it not been revealed in the Scriptures. It is at once connected both with Christian doctrine and practice; for without the belief and right apprehension of the doctrines, it cannot be understood at all. If I am to love Jesus Christ, I must know who he is, why he is worthy of my love, what are my obligations to him, and in what relation to him I am to stand in my religion. And if I love him indeed, I must shew the sincerity of my regard by obedience to his commandments, and by following his example. So that we have here the most comprehensive duty in the world: it embraces the whole of Christian faith and practice. There are many ways by which the craft of Satan and the deceit of the human heart can prevail on men to take

up with some form of Christian religion without sincerity; and it is difficult to state the fundamentals of Christ's religion in any light whatever, but some abuse or perversion may be made of it: but to state them under the idea of loving Jesus Christ, seems as little liable to such abuses as any way that I know. Indeed, a person may have warm and passionate fits of seeming regard to Christ, and in the strength of imagination may work himself up to very high sensations, and yet be destitute of the principle itself, and in his conduct quite disgrace that Divine Saviour whom he may seem to love. But this is such an abuse as a man may make of his affections in any other way as much as in religion. A person may profess very warm attachment to any fellow-creature, and yet be as unstable as the wind; have no steady, well-rooted principle of affection at all; and shew by his conduct that he has not. Love cannot be without knowledge. He who does not know what he loves a person for, loves his own fancy more than any thing else. And abuses of this sort should not discredit with us the noble principle of love itself. It is the most pleasing and the most generous affection of which the human mind is capable. When God imprinted in us the affection of love, he meant that it should have a suitable object to rest in, to be satisfied with; and doubtless God himself is properly the supreme object of love. But sinners cannot come at God without

a Mediator. Direct and immediate intercourse with God is not attainable by guilty creatures. We are distant, and estranged from him by sin; and are rather disposed to fly from him with dread, than to draw near to him with love. I confess, I like not men's talking of their love to God, without acquaintance with Christ as their Mediator. Our present circumstances, and the feelings of human nature, permit it not. Those who pretend to it, do but deceive themselves. But let us learn to know and believe the love that God hath to us in Christ, whom he sent to be a propitiation for our sins, that we may live through him; and then we solidly learn to love God. And in learning this, is it possible to be without a sincere affection to Jesus Christ? In truth, he is God and man, and all the excellencies of both are in him. Let no man fear his carrying this passion too far; let it only be a genuine affection, and not a fancy. No man need fear he shall love Jesus Christ too much. Alas! we may mourn over our defects in this matter: we are all much too cold and languid. Nor ought any one to be hindered, by the representations of the hypocrisy of many, and abuses made of this noble principle, from seeking to cultivate it with all his heart: for it is the very happiness of heaven. In that most glorious description given of the bliss of the celestial regions, in the last chapter but one of the book of the Revelations, it is said, "the Lamb is

the light thereof." Take away the love of Christ, and heaven is gone. If we truly love God, we love him in Christ his Son. If we see the love of God to us, it is shewn in Christ to us. If we admire the character of God, it is in Christ that character is seen; and the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, hath declared him to us. What is there not in him proper to engage our affections? Besides all the excellencies of the Godhead, he is a human friend. He has brought down the glories of the Godhead, as it were, to our senses: he is become one of us: he has had all our infirmities, and has suffered with us in all things. He has taken away the curse from us; he was made a curse for us. He has restored to us life everlasting. He has proved himself to be the greatest Patron to mankind that can be: and now in heaven he appears before his Father's throne, to intercede for sinful men. You may put your cause at any time into his hand as an Advocate: and him that comes to him he will in no wise cast out. He is ever ready to bestow of his own Spirit to quicken and enlighten men's minds with these truths, whenever they apply to him: for, alas! so dead is man in sins by nature, that he knows nothing at all of this subject without influence from above.

And then, the offices of King, Priest, and Prophet, which he sustains for all who believe in him, do each of them call on us to love him

most sincerely. What! shall a generous Benefactor be continually doing us good, and is it an unreasonable thing for him to expect in return that we should love him? Whether, in short, we consider him as he is in himself, or as related to us; whether we consider who he is, or what he has done for us; in both respects he is most worthy of our love. It is not therefore to be wondered at that this duty is reckoned perfectly essential in Scripture. "Grace be with all them that *love* our Lord Jesus in sincerity;" and, "if any man *love not* the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema." Here is a blessing and a curse. St. Paul speaks of the former toward the conclusion of one Epistle, of the latter toward the conclusion of another.

And you may judge now whether this love be not meant as a real affection, a genuine feeling of the soul. Indeed, the text will decide this matter. It speaks of loving *father*, or *mother*, of loving *son*, or *daughter*. Now, say, ye dutiful and affectionate children, do not you feel love to your parents? and ye, affectionate parents, do not you feel a real affection to your children? Yes, surely. Love is not a notion, a mere imagination. Nor does it suffice to say, that you behave well to your parents, or behave well to your children: there is more than decency of good behaviour toward them in your love to them: it is *inward*, and *a thing felt* in your souls; and it prompts you to

behave kindly to them. Conceive just thus of the love to Jesus Christ. It is (call the world it what they please) a generous passion, a sincere affection to the most worthy of all objects; and that man who has heard of the love of Christ to sinners, and thinks nothing of loving him again, must be pronounced a monster of unreasonable ingratitude. You need not now be puzzled in conceiving of its nature. If you know what is meant by loving a near relation, or a very dear friend, you may know what is meant by loving Jesus Christ: if one affection be felt, the other is also. And the precept of the text is, that this love of Christ ought to be stronger than all other affections. Love your parents and children; but they should not be loved to that degree with which you should love Christ. If they would hinder you from serving Christ, his love should prevail over all: *they* are not your God, nor did *they* die for you; and to a real Christian, Christ is nearer and more intimate than all friends in the world. You see, then, it is necessary that the love of Christ prevail over all, and controul all other affections, and be itself controuled by none. Nothing in the world will so sweetly help you to obey the will of God as this love. By this you will be enabled to mortify all lusts and idols. And if real Christians find the difficulty of obeying and being faithful in their Christian course, let them seek to know more of Christ's love; because, if that obtain firmer

possession of their souls, it will powerfully teach them to suffer and do whatever they are called to with delight. In a word, with this love you may go through any thing; without it, all things are grievous, men will avoid the cross, and will repine and murmur. Therefore, blessed is he who loves Jesus Christ indeed.

I have thus far laid before you a very peculiar point of Christian doctrine, that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, that Person who once appeared in the world in Judea, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was raised from the dead, and sits now at the right hand of his Father, being the true, proper, and only Mediator between God and man, ought to be loved by us sincerely, above the dearest and the nearest friends we have in the world; insomuch, that whoever is not willing to part with any person or thing in the world for his sake, is not worthy of him, ought not to expect that Christ will look on him as a disciple. And with the highest reason. He might have left us all to perish in our sins. He was under no more obligation to become man, to suffer for and to redeem us men, than he was to become an angel, to suffer for and to redeem the fallen angels. What I mean is, that his love was every way free, unmerited with regard to us, and perfectly voluntary. It became necessary, after he was made man, made under the law, that he should obey the law, because it was neces-

sary that he should be without sin, and that he should perform his Father's whole will, and execute all that was written; but previously, I say, he lay under no obligation to us, he owed us nothing. Love then moved him, and love of the purest and most unexampled kind, to submit, to obey, and to suffer for us. Therefore, besides the inexpressible loveliness of his own nature and character, our obligations to him are of the highest kind that can be conceived. Our parents indeed are our greatest benefactors on earth—(I wish children were sensible of their kindness. Alas! our ingratitude to parents is one of the most striking proofs of our depravity. We may all deeply mourn over the sins and transgressions of youth in thousands of cases, in this of disobedience and ingratitude to parents particularly)—but, yet, neither parents nor any other benefactors are at all to be compared to Jesus Christ. I should weaken the subject by attempting here to draw a formal comparison of the duties. He who made us, redeemed us, and every moment provides for us, must be nearer to us than all persons or things besides. Most reasonable is it, therefore, that we love him above all. It is not enough that we do certain outward actions which he commands us; but we should also love him inwardly, and give him our whole heart. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—this is the God who deserves our whole heart, and he ought to have it. We cannot

give it to any one of the Divine three Persons, but we give it to the other two also. There is no fear, then, while I now proceed to press on your consciences the love of Jesus Christ, that you should be led from thence to disregard the Father or the Holy Ghost, though the subject of the text calls on me to dwell particularly on the love of Jesus Christ. And the considerations resulting from his human nature, and what he does for us, and has done for us, in that nature, give a peculiar propriety to the precept.

2. I would speak a word now to men living in open sin and wickedness; to you whom both your own consciences and the observation of all men, testify to be wicked.—Have you heard the doctrine of the text? Swearers, Sabbath-breakers, men who live in sloth and idleness, lewdness and licentious uncleanness, gaming and drunkenness, Do you love Jesus Christ above all others? What! do the disciples of Jesus Christ keep company with such persons? Do Christians prefer the society of the most shameful characters of both sexes before that of the Son of God? Perhaps you will say, you do not pretend to any religion. But you do pretend to some sort of religion, and are therefore to be looked on as hypocrites, because your practice is contrary to your profession. Would not you think yourselves in some measure affronted were I to call you Heathens or Pagans? Now,

what does this shew, but that you still profess to be Christians? And then, were not you baptized in Christ's name; and are not you by that very act bound to renounce the vanity of this wicked world? Will you say, that you had no concern in your baptism? Why do not you then renounce it, now that you are come of age? But many of you have solemnly confirmed the vows of your baptism in the rite of Confirmation,—a very useful institution, and fully answering any objections that may be made about infant baptism. Your Confirmation was a solemn transaction, when you professed, that in your own persons you did take upon you those things which in your names were promised in your infancy. What, did not Jesus Christ hear and know of this; and are not you expressly bound to love and serve him supremely? Of what hypocrisy, then, are you guilty, to live in the contempt of him continually, and in defiance of all his precepts! And the case is not much different if you never were thus confirmed. So long as you keep the name of Christian, and till you by some clear and open action declare you will have nothing to do with Jesus Christ, in as solemn a manner as you were baptized in his name, every one has a right to look on you as bound and obliged by the Christian covenant.

Perhaps you have not thought it worth while to examine your religious state at all. You are so far from loving Jesus Christ above all;

that you have not at all considered what terms you stand on with respect to him in the least: If you were in possession of an estate, which came to you charged with certain payments and conditions, you would read the writing, and make yourselves masters of the whole subject, and know the footing on which you stood. Take, then, the Catechism into your hands, together with the Rite of Confirmation, as they stand in our Prayer-books, and give them a serious perusal; and apply the subject to your own case, and thence learn to convict yourselves of living in the grossest hypocrisy. And I say this, among other things, to shew you matter of just condemnation in your life and practice, which are at open war with all your engagements. Alas! it is not in my power to make you feel effectually, and to good purpose; and if you do not become thoroughly sensible of your sinful state and the evil of sin, your case is hopeless. But as you are not yet, O open sinners, out of the reach of *his* powerful grace, with whom nothing is impossible, I shall plead with you a little longer, in the hope that a gracious God may bless the word spoken to your conviction. Dare *you* say that you love Jesus Christ? If I have proved any thing by the doctrine of the text it is this, that he who does not love Jesus Christ should be considered as a monster of ingratitude, and fit only for God's wrath and indignation. Your whole life proves that you

do not love him. Your temper, your taste, your spirit, are quite opposite to his in all things. *He* went about doing good: *you* go about committing evil,—filling, *as you can*, the land with sin and mischief, and glorying in the ruin which you make of society, and particularly, in many cases, of the weaker sex, whom you corrupt with all your might and all your wicked devices. Then, do not the elder among you, who ought to be examples of sobriety and pure conversation, endeavour continually to harden the hearts of the younger in sin, and laugh them out of all religious seriousness? *He* wept over the wickedness and miseries of men: *you* make a mock at them. It was *his* meat and drink to do his Father's will: it is *your* pleasure to despise it, and trample it under foot. *He* from early life delighted in the word of God; at twelve years of age he attended the doctors in the temple, hearing them, and asking them questions: Catechisms, and in general religious instruction, appear to *you* the dullest and most stupid things in the world. *He* was subject to his parents on earth, and meekly and dutifully submitted to their commands: to cast off all restraints, and to follow your own lusts and passions, in contempt and ridicule of any wholesome advice of parents—for you are quite above all idea of receiving commands from them—this has been *your* way. *He* wrought with his hands for bread, and was content with poverty: it is in *your* hearts to

set up a sort of unbecoming independency, if you can, and to live in idleness and extravagance. He could not endure profaneness; he drove the buyers and sellers out of the temple, and said they made it "a den of thieves." And if you, who cannot behave with decorum even in God's house, were this day to be called out of the world, and were your spirits to attempt to mount into heaven, do you suppose the holy Jesus would receive you? Would he not drive you thence, as not "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light?" Is there not in every thing a full contrariety between him and you? His kingdom is not of this world: your taste is altogether gross and earthly; and you yourselves, if you pleased, could help me to a much more striking display of the opposition between Jesus and you, were you to describe particularly how you live from day to day in filthiness and vice.

Recollect this one thing further: Christ says to his disciples and followers, "He that receiveth you, receiveth me." This is one of the surest marks by which a man may know whether he loves Christ. He loves the brethren of Christ, those who evidently have his image and spirit. He has a peculiar delight in them, which arises from the love he has to Christ himself. This you are not only without, but you have something particularly contrary to it. It is mirth to you to ridicule the most serious and the

gravest characters in religion; and if Jesus Christ were this day to appear among us, as he did in Judea, doubtless, with your spirit, under like circumstances, you would join with his enemies in crucifying him. The land mourns under the two crying sins of uncleanness and drunkenness. You practise these: and while such sins are delighted in by you, your practice too clearly shews that you both hate and despise Jesus Christ, whatever you pretend. And have you made up your minds what you will say to him, when you shall appear before him? "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." Think, ye drunkards and unclean persons! those eyes which have sparkled with pleasure at the sight of strong drink, and those eyes which are full of adultery, those very eyes must meet the eyes of the Son of God! Can ye endure; will not your hearts sink within you? Will you then be in a humour to make a jest of holy men and of holiness? Will not horror seize you, and pangs which cannot now be even conceived? That holy Personage, full of love and compassion, who did so much for you, and so long exercised compassion toward you—oh! to see that Lamb of God now turned into an indignant Judge against you! What! all his kindness thrown away on you? your hard heart never to be moved to love him? Hear his voice! "Depart,

ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!" There is an assembly of evil spirits to which you must then be consigned, for them you have studied to please rather than Jesus Christ, and you have dispositions fitted for that wretched society, where your laughter will be turned into heaviness and mourning for ever.

I speak plain truths to you, careless sinners. To prevent all these evils, "repent, and believe the Gospel," while time remains; for I have missed my aim, if this day, in placing life and death before you, I have not dropped a word in season, which, by the blessing of God, may prove an useful admonition, and make you see the wickedness of not loving Jesus Christ. I own, that some of the profane sort whom I am addressing, as years and experience teach them something of worldly wisdom, reform, and live more prudently and regularly, and think to pacify God for their past transgressions by some external acts of obedience. But all this is no conversion, if you learn not to love Jesus Christ; and this you will not do, except you be convinced of the great sin of hating him. Agreeably to the text, I have endeavoured to apply myself to your consciences with this view. Enter into your hearts, and beg of God to enable you, by comparing your lives with the rule of his word, to estimate what is the true state of your souls. I have this morning considered one of those rules, which is, the

duty of loving Jesus Christ—a very pleasant, excellent, reasonable duty: for what is so reasonable as gratitude? and do not all men own an ungrateful person to have a very bad heart? How black, then, must be the case of those who all their days hitherto have been enemies of the very best Friend to mankind! May you feel the force of this consideration, loathe yourselves, repent, and never rest till he wash you in his blood from your filthiness, and make you meet for his kingdom.

SERMON XIII.

THE HAPPINESS OF TRUSTING IN THE LORD.

PROV. xvi. 20.

Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he.

SIMPLE recipe of happiness! How singularly divine is the Scripture! You might look over all the volumes of human philosophy, all the creeds and systems of all religions besides, and you would not find such a sentiment as this, "Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he." The Epicurean philosophers directed men to place their happiness in pleasure. The Stoic, made the chief good of man to consist in virtue. But what did they mean by virtue? a proud self-confidence. They directed a man to remove his confidence from all other objects, and to fix it—where? on himself! To trust himself was the way to make him happy! Man was to be a sort of god to himself, and in the resources of his own mind to find his bliss! Ah! wretched plan of happiness! Who, that knows his own weakness and blindness, can trust in himself? It required a very unwarrantable insolence of pride to bring a man to place his happiness in his own resources. The

Academics, and other sects of pagan philosophy, content themselves with disputing against all other opinions, and establish nothing certain or solid in their room: and Mahometans, Indian Bramins, Papists, Socinians, and all Christian formalists, in the account which they give of happiness, are all of one religion; they always send a man to self-dependence. Let a man attend to such and such things—ceremonies, morals, or something else, it matters not what it be, but let him depend on himself, and in the strength of his own mind—and for the merit of such and such good actions, he may work himself into happiness. So that, in this view, all religions and systems of morals may be reduced to one thing: to trust in a man's self for happiness is the simple point of all. And such a plan is what it may be expected man would fall into, since he fell from God. For what was it that brought about the fall of man, and the first sin in paradise? was it not self-dependence? Did not man cease to put his trust in God; set up for self, in the spirit of independence; and contrive to be happy by his own strength? We know he thence became to himself only a region of misery and desolation? We all naturally walk in this way: we trust to an arm of flesh: and all the religions, and plans to make men happy, which men have invented, are all constructed on this self-righteous principle.

But, behold, superior and alone, in a sin-

gular light, stands the religion of God. It teaches, as in the text, to trust in the Lord: that man is happy who does so. What Solomon thus briefly expresses, is the substance of the Bible. Would you be happy? mark what the Lord saith. Happiness is a great word; oh, we all pant after it! Here it is: learn to trust in the Lord for it. And here you do nothing, you know nothing, you contrive nothing: you only know yourself wretched, and all that is vile and empty and helpless; and you behold the Lord himself your supreme good; and you trust him as such; and as such you make him your own, when you trust him. It is not that you are called on to feel any happiness before you trust him, or to have any resources at all beforehand: only you trust him; and it rests with his veracity to make you happy.

See you how singular this plan of religion is, how entirely distinct from any other? Men need not be distracted with a multiplicity of plans and opinions: there are but *two*, there can be no more, in the nature of things. Men may differ about a thousand little things, which do not affect the general principle; but this is the single note of distinction,—trust in self, or trust in God. The first, is man's religion, and meant to honour man, and is the same in Pagan philosopher, Mahometan, or nominal Christian: the second, is God's religion, and it is the faith of Jesus; for, in trusting the

Lord, we trust in Jesus, in whom alone God appears a suitable object of our trust. And it is remarkable, that even the very idea of trusting all with God, or of loving God, however familiar it sound in our ears, is not to be found in any one who ever wrote or said any thing concerning religion or morality, independent of the Bible. Before the publication of the Scriptures, or among those who knew them not, I do not remember, in the whole course of my reading, to have met with the idea so much as once, either of trusting or of loving God. Many enemies of the real religion of Jesus have used the term since, but with what heifer they ploughed is not hard to guess; and still, though they use the term, they adulterate and reduce to nothing the grace itself.

I set before you then, brethren, this day, God's recipe for happiness; "Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he." Do consider it, do distinguish it from all other ideas and plans of religion. Weigh deeply what it means and what it implies. We are used to the expressions, trusting God, and loving God. It is to be feared numbers, to whom the terms are not strange, are strange to the idea itself. Do you indeed remove your confidence from all things else? Do you say with the Psalmist, but heartily, "It is good for me to hold me fast by God, to put my trust in the Lord God?" This is true religion. Did thousands enter into their own hearts honestly, they might find they have not

a grain of it. Faith worketh by love: if I learn indeed to trust the Lord alone, it will teach me to love him supremely, and thus I shall be happy.

The text has been explained. We have seen in general, and yet distinctly, the way of happiness. Man must trust in something for it. I am to shew what is that solid good in which he may trust and never be disappointed. Let us consider, if you please, more particularly, first, the way in which a man is brought to lay hold of this the Christian plan of happiness; secondly, how it operates in the production of blessedness in this life; and then, thirdly, in that which is to come. And, O blessed God, let not even my feeble labours be in vain. Let these souls, with mine, be led by thy good Spirit successfully to take hold of Thee as our chief good; and find the subject before us, not empty speculation, but power and life to our souls; and we shall praise thee with unfeigned hearts, having learned the judgments of thy righteousness.

1. To see distinctly the way in which a man is brought to lay hold of the Christian plan of happiness, it must be observed, that it is not born with us; it must be taught of God by his word and Spirit. It must be learnt. Man is, in the first place, in misery and in guilt, in bondage and in blindness. He knows not God nor himself. He walks in a vain shadow; and, trusting in vanity, finds vanity to be his re-

compence. Yet while he remains with the allowance of hope in himself, and unconvinced that he is a ruined creature, he will still seek for the "life of his hand" (Isa. lvii.) first in one way, and then another: and if he continue on this plan, he will weary out life in variety of wretchedness, never dreaming that he misses of happiness because his whole plan in religion is wrong; but fancying, were it not for this, and were it not for that, he should compass his point. But the condition of our first parents after the Fall well represents his state. They fled from God, and hid themselves. Thus do fallen men. With not the least spark of love to their Maker, and with a consciousness of guilt, and a secret terror, despondency, and distrust of God, and an enmity against him and his government, they keep as far from God, and shut him out of their thoughts as much as possible. But, now, when Divine conviction has fastened on his soul, the man feels this his wretchedness, he knows this his uncleanness; and when, by experience and increasing light, he comes to know more of his own heart, he is well ascertained that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. But what is that light which, darting from above, now enters his mind? God in Christ reconciling the world to himself. This he is now made acquainted with. And can any thing in the world be more precious and suitable than such a discovery? God his Sa-

vigour, to him who is lost? Thus, by the invincible hand of the Most High, in wisdom worthy of God, and in conformity to the doctrines of Scripture, he is taught (see you not distinctly the way how he is taught, beloved fellow-Christians?) to remove his trust from himself, and to fix it upon the Lord alone. He, who finds himself empty of righteousness before God, receives it in Jesus, who is the gift of righteousness. He, who feels himself blind, and destitute altogether of true wisdom, receives Jesus as his wisdom, and, behold! he is made wise to salvation. And he, whom sin and the devil carry on, a slave and a drudge, receives the King and Captain of his salvation, and, behold! he is made the Lord's freeman. But he descends that he may rise. In ceasing to trust himself, he is humbled, and feels what he is and what he deserves: here is repentance. In learning to trust the Lord, he is refreshed, and feels what Jesus is to him, an all-accomplished Saviour: and here is faith. And thou, O humbled seeker after God, who canst find no one good property in thee, nothing but wickedness and hypocrisy and uncleanness, and art saying, O that I was led into this way of happiness! venture on Jesus freely; let no other trust intrude. All the fitness he requires of thee, is so to feel thy need of him as gladly to receive him. Do so, and be happy. But remember, thou must believe first, and expect to feel happiness after. And

yet, in the present life this happiness is far from being perfect; whence I am led,

2dly, To shew what happiness is obtained in this life.

The foundation of it lies in the recovery of the Divine image and favour through Christ Jesus, which is by faith received. They who trust in the Lord begin to be happy. They receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, even the righteousness of Jesus Christ. By this they pass from death to life. Whatever was lost in Adam and in self, is in Christ, and in his gift of righteousness, recovered to them. They begin now to live again to God, what deserves the name of life. And blessed be God for the declaration, worth more than millions of worlds, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Indeed, true Christians, even the best Christians, feeling their corruption and the perverseness of their natures, and being often charged with guilt in their consciences, would be of all men most miserable, were it not for such declarations: for to them alone, of all men, sin is a serious evil, and they feel the burden of it. Pharisees, and all who regard not Christ and heavenly things, have slight thoughts of sin, and therefore may seem to have the advantage in this life over real Christians, by their pride and their insensibility; and it must not be dissembled, that they escape many a pang to which his sensibility of conscience exposes the

serious Christian. But, then, no Christian will envy them this advantage. It results only from stupidity; and they will have to feel so much the more horror hereafter. Only let the Christian sustain his character, that he trust in the Lord for this grace which abounds much more than sin has abounded, and even in this life (for in the world to come no comparison can be made)—but even in this life he has eminently the advantage. He has a forgiving God to trust in. The blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin. This gives peace of conscience, surely an infinitely better peace than that false one which pride and stupidity may give the unconverted. And though he feel the motions of his sinful nature, yet surely the foundation of life on which he stands is strong. He shall reign in life. Sin shall not have dominion over him. And the imputed righteousness on which he builds is firm, and solid, and Divine, and perfect. It is by trusting in it that he is happy and has peace in this life, even amidst the imperfections of his best performances.

Let those who look to Jesus, see then and know their advantages. You are on the mount of God's free love in Jesus: take a cheering prospect around you: Christ's imputed righteousness—and perfect atonement—and ever-prevailing intercession. You must by faith, brethren, look often to them; weigh their import and their influence; exercise your faith

and hope on them; so shall you see yourselves happy in God's love, while you always loathe yourselves as unworthy. And this is the secret of Christian happiness, which I pray God you and I may understand and apply much better than we do at present. For, in such a world of infirmity as this, the sincerest souls (and I am not going to encourage hypocrites) need continually to refresh themselves with these views; and the Holy Ghost, as a Comforter, is promised to the Church on purpose that they may be thus comforted in Christ. For how does David describe the blessedness of a Christian in this life? It is not by saying, blessed is he who never sins, or is in a sinless state—there are no such beings on earth; —but, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." And if he do not impute sin to him, he does impute righteousness: and St. Paul tells me this righteousness is that of Jesus Christ: so that it seems wonderful that any one who regards the Gospel should ever find fault with the expression, "imputed righteousness." If our blessedness depends on forgiveness, it must of course be by righteousness being imputed to us. So that to profess to regard the atonement of Christ and forgiveness of sins by him, and yet to quarrel with the expression "imputed righteousness," which is a Scripture phrase repeated over and over,

and at the same time to be fond of the expression "the merits of Christ," which is not a Scripture term—all this seems to me a childish pettishness and spirit of caviling; which yet I can easily forgive in some good men, who have unwarily fallen into it while they meant to oppose the licentiousness of unsound teachers. But, to pass this, and proceed with what is far more weighty.

You see, brethren, here the force of the text, "Blessed is he who trusts in the Lord." How? Not because he is sinless, but because his sins are forgiven. Hold this fast by stedfast confidence, Christian, and thou shalt feel thy happiness; for there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. It is not said, There is no sin or evil in them; but, There is no condemnation to them for it—that is, it is forgiven in Jesus, or righteousness is imputed to them;—though it must be added, and this is their character, They walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit,—not after the old man, as they were wont formerly to do, and as all unconverted persons do, but after the new man. O what an advantage! sin forgiven, conscience at peace! And what a refreshing consolation against indwelling sin! it is forgiven, and it shall not reign over them. Then death, the dread of the rest of mankind, is to them converted into a friend: it will soon transmit them into regions of bliss. All troubles and chastisements, too, work for good. Oh, when

this is truly believed, what a fund of patience and contentment, and, by the supply of the Spirit of Jesus, what strength, is given men to subdue the strongest lustings of sin, and to grow in the pure love of God and of their neighbour! Hence the fruit of the Spirit is found to be "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." A sense of gratitude also toward Christ, and a sense of their own unworthiness—what do these things produce? Love to God, and true humility, and forgiveness of injuries committed against themselves. O ye who trust the Lord, happy are ye. These are your advantages for happiness even in this life. You feel, it is true, miseries, as the world does; but you have reliefs and prospects which it has not. Use them by faith, only with diligence and constancy improving your interest and communion with Jesus, and you will feel these your advantages: and you will find the path of the just to be a shining light, which shineth more and more to the perfect day.

But to trust the Lord, there is the secret! —A man may have his head filled with all the doctrines of the Scriptures, and yet in the trust of his heart be as if he professed no regard for them at all. And surely if he content himself with the doctrines, he will naturally suffer his faith to be like that of others: for all men, naturally, are looking to something or other for happiness: pleasure, riches, esteem,

learning, or morality—something or other that is not God, draws men's affections. A real Christian is distinguished from all men by his faith: he trusts in God, through Christ, for eternal life, and he gives up all other things for this.

And I think it is now sufficiently clear how much advantage, even in this world, such a life of faith has above every other plan; for there is not any one thing that can be named, which men can trust to besides, but vanity is written on its forehead. All, all may fail us, and will surely fail us at one time or other, even when we most want them. But he whose confidence is in God alone, has engaged Omnipotence itself to befriend him; and the Lord considers his own honour as engaged to support him. And hence it is that we have known true Christians, in the most distressed situation possible, without health, without money, in the most abject circumstances, yet then most remarkably joyful, and that too for a long time, when others wonder what it is that can make them be happy. The world will scarce believe it; but they have, like their Master, meat to eat which the world knows not of. God knows how to fill the soul that trusts him, substantially with good, inward good, the life of God within, when every outward thing fails. And the Lord loves to shew and prove this most sensibly in such trying circumstances. And I have seen per-

sons in this state most serene and blissful, far more so than others whose corn and wine and oil increased. But this is what David means, when he says, "There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart." This is what David wants; here is bliss: and here is what Christians feel; this is what is called enthusiasm. O that the world would attend to the Scriptures; see what is there revealed; seek and find it for themselves. Surely they would then reverence what they now despise.

I must mention *one* advantage more of Christians in this life. The prospect which is before them is truly pleasant and refreshing. "A little longer, and then—a little longer, and then"—This is indeed what all are apt to say. Hope is natural to man. He never feels in this life what makes him truly happy; but he is continually apt to fancy that by and bye he shall find bliss: when such and such points are gained, he shall have his heart's content. But "let not him that is deceived trust in vanity; for vanity shall be his recompence." The world has not happiness to give. Let a man choose what he would have, and carve for himself, still, when he has attained all, he would be restless, unsatisfied, discontented. God never meant to create a happiness for man out of himself; and all who trust not in him are like the Prodigal Son, a region of desolation to

themselves. The soul, which its Maker alone can fill, will starve without God in the midst of plenty. Or if good animal spirits, and the deceitful glow of youth, and the charms of pleasure and prosperity, can give a temporary flash of pleasure, how disagreeable to reflect, that soon, by death at least, all these things will be removed for ever. Oh the misery of a mind which neither knows nor relishes any gratifications but those that are worldly! In their life-time they choose their good things; and the longer they live, the less pleasant their prospect grows. Infirmities, crosses, disappointments, and death to close the scene of all this vanity, are at hand. Is it possible that a thinking spirit, capable of looking into futurity, can be happy with such prospects? But with him who trusts in the Lord, it is just the contrary: the further he extends his views, the more pleasant and bright the prospect. The world to come, which no unconverted man can behold with any sort of complacency, is to him the most delightful; for his heart is enamoured with the sweetness of God. And because here his taste is imperfect, his enjoyment interrupted, and his understanding partial, and it is his burden to feel many things contrary to this sweetness; therefore he groans, earnestly desiring to enter into the joy of his Lord, where that bliss, of which here his perceptions are so faint (but yet they are real) and his enjoyments so imperfect (but yet they are

real)—that bliss shall be perfected indeed. *He* says then, as well as the worldling, "A little longer, and then"—but he can say so with solid pleasure: he has good ground for saying so. In a little time, "he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Yes; he shall see the God of Israel, and walk with him in white. O aged professors of godliness, are you often thinking of your near approach to the heavenly rest? Is there indeed a Divine nature in you longing after it with sincere ardour? If there be, it will deaden you to the world, make you content with your condition under the hand of God, and draw out daily your soul after him whom you love. In this last respect, then, it may well be said, "He that trusteth in the Lord, happy is he;" for his prospects are happy. Whatever troubles come in his way, he looks above and beyond them to the haven of rest. He shall soon be at home.

In a word, the man of this world has his heart and treasure here; he holds his good by the slender tenure of the breath of his nostrils; his prospects are every day growing worse and worse. He takes his fill at first; and he will starve by and bye, and pine in misery. A real Christian has, if you please, his most disagreeable things at first, in the bitterness of repentance, in the mortification of his lusts and passions. But his prospects brighten by degrees; heaven is their end, in one sense, and yet heaven has no end, in

another. Who cannot see what a difference this must make in the article of peace of mind even here? We have seen how the Christian's plan operates in producing happiness in this life. How it will do so in the world to come, though this be far more important than the other, yet you will not expect I should undertake with any accuracy to describe. God grant us the experience of it only, and we shall feel happiness overflowing; "for it doth not yet appear what we shall be." Yet I will try to give you a faint idea of what is meant by that inconceivably blissful saying, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

What is the joy of the Lord? Conceive it thus. Let a man set aside from his thoughts all worldly and carnal enjoyments, as not worthy to be mentioned here; let the pleasures of human society and human literature be also set aside, for they are far too low. Let him ascend in his ideas above the air and sky, up to what St. Paul calls the third heaven. Let him cease to gaze on the most beautiful and glorious works of God; he has greater things still in view. Let him forget also himself—that busy, proud, important thing, a man's self, which creates for us here such a world of woe—and let him hear the Lord speak; the Lord, through the channel and medium of human nature; I mean, the Lord Jesus: for the glory of God lightens heaven, but "the Lamb is the light thereof." Let him hear and see

Jesus, not now in parables, types, and figures; not in the glass of the Scriptures, as here, by reflection; but the Lord himself let him see, as he is, in all his beauty and glory. While he sees, he shall be changed into his likeness, and, awaking after his likeness, he shall be "satisfied" with it. The Lord is love, and he sees this love, and learns to love, to be full of love, all over love, at the sight. And this is to enter into the joy of his Lord. In the Divine presence is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for ever. Thus happy, brethren, is, and for ever will be, he who trusts in the Lord. It is in a very particular manner that God gives happiness. He sells it not for our works, as all religions but that of the Scriptures teach: he gives it to poor sinners who trust him for it. Learn you, brethren, to trust him in Jesus; and, however imperfect your conceptions be of happiness, you shall certainly have it. Your ignorance will be no bar to your happiness. He who hath said, "He that trusteth in the Lord, happy is he," will surely make it good.

SERMON XIV.

THE ART OF CONTENTMENT.

PHILIP. iv. 11.

I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

It seems, to *learn* to be content is necessary: it is not natural to us. St. Paul went to school for it: and he had learnt the lesson. Let us consider, first, the necessity and importance of this lesson, from the nature of our circumstances in this world; secondly, let us endeavour to lay open the mystery of those instructions by which St. Paul so well understood the secret of contentment. We may then apply the subject *to the wicked*, and *to the righteous*. And, O may the God of patience be with us, instructing us also in this arduous but most useful attainment.

1. The necessity of the lesson is quite obvious and plain. The least attention to our circumstances will convince us of it. Adam indeed, before he fell, had no occasion to learn this doctrine of contentment. There is no mystery in a man's being content with his condition, when every thing around him and within

him is just as he would wish it. A pleasant paradise, with all the delights and comforts of life, and no more labour than what was agreeable and salutary; a mind at peace with his God; a disposition right with his Maker in all things; and the strongest thirst of his soul after bliss ever copiously supplied by the all-bountiful Creator: these things rendered it impossible that he should be unhappy even for a moment. Well may a man be content who meets with nothing to try his patience, who meets not with a single circumstance to thwart his will. But, alas! the gold is now become dim; the crown is fallen from our head; and he who knew earthly things well, and was no flatterer of human nature, though himself placed in circumstances the most easy and the most prosperous, declared, "all is vanity and vexation of spirit." Place a man in the most enviable situation; still there are uneasinesses, from little circumstances and cross accidents, which are so continually incident to this the most prosperous condition, that surely there is a frequent call for the exercise of patience; and some, perhaps many tempers, need to learn this lesson of contentment in the most affluent situation, as much as those who struggle under the severest calamities. But, besides this, what evils does the world abound with? Sickness, poverty, reproach, fill the world with variety of wretchedness. And the near approach of death to us all, with

the tedious circumstances attendant on old age, proclaims our lot to be miserable. But sin is the bitter root whence all these branches of evil proceed. Ever since sin came into the world, woe and pain have been its attendants. The fever of anger, the slow consumption of envy, and the lethargy of sloth, gnaw or benumb the very vitals of the soul. And, as if the necessary evils of life were not sufficient, we multiply them ten thousand fold by worrying and tormenting one another. Then, oh that uneasy vacancy arising from our distance from God, and the horrors of a guilty conscience! this is the hell of the soul. A few, indeed, restored through grace to Divine favour and communion, walk with a spirit and a hope and a taste quite superior to the rest of mankind. But they also have need to learn to possess their souls in patience; for, without it, to what woes are they continually subject! They are exposed still to sin and temptation, as well as others; with this difference, that sin is to their sensible minds the severest burden, and constitutes the most serious conflict, unknown to the unconverted. Nor is it pleasant to be assailed by the wrath and malice and frowns of an unfriendly world, and that persecution which more or less befals all who will live godly in Christ Jesus. Add to this the redoubled malice and refined subtlety of Satan, tempting, disquieting, and distressing them from time to time, in a way best known to themselves.

A world, then, for St. Paul's mysterious instruction in the art of contentment! He who has it, has a jewel. The evils of life are rendered tolerable by it, which are else intolerable: and by this a Christian waits till his happy change come. Certainly, and it must be deeply observed, this lesson, like every other spiritual good thing, is not learnt by the light of nature and common sense. There is something *like* patience which human philosophy pretends to teach, but it is all pride and hardness of heart: it is as different from St. Paul's contentment as hell is from heaven. He that would learn true contentment (and its necessity is now sufficiently evinced), must go to school, with Paul, to Jesus the Son of David; and by his Spirit, in inward teaching according to the word, be formed to patience.

2. This let us, secondly, attend to.—It is obvious, at first sight, that he who would learn to be content, should learn to fix his thoughts and desires on some future object. This is the way by which we naturally strive to comfort persons who are at present involved in deep distress. We tell them, they should be patient; things will be better by and bye: such and such persons and things will relieve them. And thus it is, even in a natural and worldly sense, that we hope for that we see not, and thence are induced in patience to wait for it: and thus it is that the soldier, the sailor, the merchant, the tradesman, is animated to support various

troubles and calamities, by the cheerful prospect which he has in future. But if our idea of future things reaches not beyond the grave; if this world's goods be all that we have in view; it is plain they are poor, unsatisfying, uncertain prospects at best, and such as death is sure to deprive of us in a little time. Behold, then, the true ground of patience,—hope, and hope full of immortality. But we need a Divine teaching, a spiritual illumination, to enter into the force of this idea. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." If we were sufficient of ourselves to teach ourselves this lesson, plain and obvious as it may seem, there were no occasion for the Psalmist to pray this prayer. We assent, indeed, to the truth of these things. Life is short: a shadow, a vapour, a span, or whatever term expressive of littleness or instability, we can give it. Time is nothing to eternity: what are a few years' trouble, compared with an eternity of bliss! How reasonable to bear the former, then, from the hope of the latter! But so it is—and I appeal to the feelings and experience of my audience if it be not so—that, though we do assent to this, and can find no objection to make against the reasoning, yet the practical conclusion does not follow: we are still impatient, discontented, and fretful, if present things succeed not to our mind. A very important lesson is hence to be learnt, deeply

entering into St. Paul's doctrine, "*I have learned.*" We must, indeed we must, *learn* from above, from the Holy Ghost, to understand and feel the force of heavenly and eternal views. Our nature can never bring us to it. Oh for a Divine faith, which brings heaven, and Christ the glory of heaven, down into the soul! Let him who has it, seek and pray for more; and let him who has it not, learn at length to know his wants, and cry for the new birth unto righteousness.

When the Holy Spirit of Jesus has led you into this mystery, death will appear to you near, and just at hand, nor will any worldly thing whatever appear inviting to you. You will look above all your troubles, and beyond them, to eternity. The natural tendency of the human mind to fix on some future good, in order to comfort and relieve it under present pressures and anxieties, here finds, not an airy, slight, and trifling, but a real, solid, substantial object. Oh what sweetness, what beauty, what delight, is there in that representation, "They shall hunger no more, nor thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat: but the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them to living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes!" "They shall walk with me in white," says the Saviour; and "I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels." He

who is taught of God this great mystery of contentment, can say, then, 'I live for eternity: I am not swallowed up with present cares and sorrows: I feel them as a man; my thoughts, however, brood not over them. I am made patient under my crosses, because the light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for me a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'—Do you really believe there is a place of rest which remains for the people of God? Has the Spirit opened to you the prospect of the kingdom of heaven? See you its true nature—the enjoyment of God; pure love; spotless, unmixed enjoyment; communion, free and uninterrupted, and, to crown all, everlasting, with Him who loved you and washed you from your sins in his own blood, and in him the enjoyment of the society of the spirits of just men made perfect; a body like to his glorious body, incorruptible and immortal; no more sin, no more pain, no more temptation? Is this before you day by day, as the object you aim at, you press after? Do you feel that present afflictions are made light hereby? Are your desires moderated after the good things of the world, and your sorrows moderated also on account of its evil things? Happy ye! I congratulate you who in any sincere measure feel this to be the case. Were an angel from heaven to tell you your sins were forgiven, it would not be a surer testimony that you are children of God, than

this which it is your privilege to know from what you feel in your own breasts. Ye have learnt how to be content: and "he who hath wrought you for this self-same thing is God, who hath also given you the earnest of the Spirit."

But, whatever belief men may pretend of heaven and a future state, if worldly things so take them up that they have no leisure, no heart, to think of eternity; and would rather stay in this world than depart hence, if only they might have all things according to their mind; they are not, cannot be, solidly content. They are kept on the fret from day to day; and having not the helm of Divine faith to steer their course aright, have no true, well-grounded assurance of Divine favour, and are driven from wave to wave of misery. They need to be converted and born again. For, to prevent mistakes, and clear up the matter still farther, it is not a mere belief of a future state of bliss that will suffice for us here: we ought to have a well-grounded assurance of our interest in it, in order to learn contentment with our present condition. When pain, sickness, poverty, disgrace, losses, disappointments, and the variety of human wretchedness, afflict us, it is not a cold belief of a future state of bliss which will comfort the mind, and compose it to patient suffering. I ask any distressed person, whether he finds that he could be satisfied by such considerations as these: "I am, it is

true, afflicted much at present; but a future life beyond the grave will come by and bye, and then all who partake of it shall be happy?" Does not common sense point out, 'What is this to me, except I have an interest in this future state of bliss?' If you say, you hope so, because your life is good, take heed you deceive not yourselves: your life has not been good: you are sinners from the womb, sinners by nature, and sinners in practice. And in fact, however well a man may outbrave others in talking at this rate, while in health and good spirits, it is plain, when evils and afflictions draw nigh, this is no true, solid, and genuine comfort. For, if conscience be alarmed at all to do her office, such men cannot look beyond the grave with boldness; nor have they those views of the spiritual glory and true nature of heaven, which should make it desirable for them, above all things, to go thither. Let us be serious, brethren, about heaven and heavenly things. If we understand them aright, all our comfort and contentment under present afflictions must be founded on them. In heaven they sing, "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." He who travels a pilgrim indeed to heaven, while he feels his sin and his misery at present, can cheer himself thus: 'Well, the more I feel these evils now, the fitter shall I be to sing this song hereafter.' And while he is thus minded, his patience cannot be worn out. 'I am led more and more by all these

things,' he says, 'to prize heaven, and my disease is working for itself a cure.' Oh how patient does he become, patient and content, with this consideration! For, let it be marked, the promise of the Spirit is given through faith: he believes; and, believing, is sealed to the day of redemption. The Spirit of Christ witnesses within him, 'This heaven is mine, this God is my God, not for my goodness (for I am vile), but because my Redeemer died for me.' He has an interest in the things he believes. You understand, words are needless to make you understand, how powerfully he must hence learn, in whatsoever state he is, therewith to be content. And this is farther strengthened by considering, that in the sealing of the Spirit he has part of heaven brought into his soul already. Heaven is not altogether unknown to him. Its God, its Saviour, its Comforter, its holy joys, employments, and pleasures, are somewhat familiar to him already. One reason why unconverted men can derive no comfort from heavenly prospects, but in all their afflictions are cast down as much as if they never heard of heaven, besides the horrors of guilt, is, that heavenly prospects are unknown to them. What is unknown we suspect, we fly from as uncomfortable; and I may appeal to the feelings of many, whether heaven itself is not uncomfortable to their thoughts on this account. Learn hence, you need to be born again. In

the mean time, what a mighty consolation is it to believers, that, if God "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for them all, how shall he not with him also freely give them all things!" Trouble arises not out of the dust. Every cross they can look on as sent, for some good end, from the Best of Friends, from unerring Wisdom. "For all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." No one thing is left to themselves; all is ordered in number, weight, and measure, by their God: his covenant in Jesus has engaged for every thing for them. This completes their contentment. But the ungodly can have no such consolation.

To apply, then, in brief, this very useful subject to the righteous, and to the wicked.

"Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings."—You are born to trouble as well as the wicked. But, see your consolation. Here you have no continuing city, you seek one to come. Through much tribulation you must enter into it. Its bliss you pant after as true bliss. You are interested in it by faith: you have the earnest of it already in your soul, and a promising covenant God engaged "to make all things work together for your good." What remains, but that you lay these considerations together, and, by daily cherishing them, improve them into their happy effect

of a contented mind? It much dishonours Divine grace if God's people go on discontented, fretful, repining, anxious with various cares, and not resigned to their Heavenly Father's will. Always expect trouble in this life, rest hereafter. You have sufficient grounds for learning, with Paul, "in whatsoever state you are, therewith to be content." I have laid open the lesson this day. If you would see still better how he learnt it, study with much prayer the seventh and eighth chapters of Romans. Do not suffer these lessons to remain useless. Meditate daily on them, improve them into practice, and you will learn to be content.

O wicked men! what shall I say to you? There is a heaven, but it is for the righteous. There is an interest in it to be felt in this life by God's people: you are not interested in these things. Some portion of heaven is to be felt in the soul in this life: you have no idea of this. "All things work together for good to them that love God:" this should be no comfort to you, who do not love him. I know not how to exhort you to be content as you are: pride, or a natural good-temper, may do something, but nothing on right principles. "Repent, and believe the Gospel;" become new creatures; and on this ground learn contentment.

SERMON XV.

PATIENCE DESCRIBED AND COMMENDED.

ECCLES. vii. 8, 9.

Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof; and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry; for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.

THIS Book of Ecclesiastes may well be called the guide of human life. It does not give us a flattering picture of earthly happiness, a picture which is sure to disappoint us upon trial; but it faithfully tells us, that the world is full of vanity and big with misery. There are, however, certain rules, by observing which, those who believe in God through Christ for life everlasting may be much relieved in their passage, and enjoy with gratitude to God the good things of life, without being cast down with its evils. This is one of its rules,—Patience; and the conquest of its opposite evil, anger, or hastiness of spirit. "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof; and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry; for anger resteth in the bosom of

fools." God, in his infinite wisdom, is carrying on a scheme of amazing goodness through the miserable confusions of the earth. Those, and those only, who believe and love him, and wait for the second coming of his Son Jesus as their grand object, shall see and taste this goodness at the last day, and shall feast upon it thenceforward for ever. Unbelievers, the unconverted, the haters of the Lord, can make no very valuable use of the subject before us, to direct their tempers and practice. They may, and I would to God they might, make use of it to shew them their present miserable, condemned state, that they may repent, believe the Gospel, and be saved. But to those who have faith in Christ as their principle, the text speaks with power; and though the nature of the subject will not lead me so much to attend to the first principles of faith, I desire they may be borne in mind by you all the time. What I have to say is built on them: without them, it is mere morality, a castle in the air.

The "beginning of things" in a Christian's experience, is much the same as in the whole of God's dealings, seemingly weak, mean, and miserable. It was thus with the work of redemption itself. How low and mean, humanly speaking, its beginning! Christ a human infant! in a manger! hunted from his birth, as it were, by a tyrant; carried into Egypt; and the occasion of the death of many infants at

Bethlehem: afterwards living poor and despised, and dying betwixt two thieves on a cross! But mark the end! he is raised from the dead; he ascends into heaven; he is King of kings and Lord of lords; he shall judge men and devils; and shall reign for ever. How does this exemplify the declaration, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof!" It will be so with thee, tempted, weary, distressed Christian. Thy spiritual life began, it may be, with sharp distress and bondage of the law: it is still carried on with many a pang of conflict; but, like thy Saviour's, it shall in the end be sweet, and everlastingly glorious. "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer."

"And the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry; for anger resteth in the bosom of fools."—Discontent and anger are founded in pride. Our foolish reason prescribes to God, He should have ordered affairs with us so and so, in a way more agreeable to our humour. We like not that word, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." Believers should know that this is madness and blasphemy: "anger resteth in the bosom of fools." Opposite to this pride of spirit is the patience of spirit here recommended. Wait, endure; let the Lord take his course: he will do so whether

we will or not; but freely suffer him to do it: trust for the event. Cultivate an humble meekness and long-suffering patience in all cases toward God, and one another: this world's course of things requires it; the chastisement of our sins demands it. We are not fit judges of God's will: only this we know, he makes all things work together for good to them that love him. Rare foundation of patience! Build patience upon it: there is no going on comfortably without it. Would you have us speak of joy of the Holy Ghost, and the pleasantness of communion with Jesus, and the beauty and sweetness of the Saviour? As God shall help me, beloved brethren, I shall do it from time to time; but do not despise the subject before us. Low and common as it may seem, it needs attention in its place. Comfort and duty should go hand in hand. We must not think to be carried to heaven always in high joy. Mourning and conflict are very needful also: and he who slights the subject of patience will find himself a poor novice in the Christian life.

I shall now endeavour to recommend this virtue to your cultivation, by a view of its excellencies and importance, speaking all the way to believers; and a few words, toward the close, to unbelievers, with reference to the subject.

1. Patience is a meek but truly magnanimous virtue.—"If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." "Not a

hair of your head shall perish." "In your patience possess ye your souls." The moment that the pilgrim is fixed in his ultimate aim, and firmly believes the certainty of that eternal life to which he is hastening, of which he has received the gift by faith, patience becomes as necessary for his comfort in his pilgrimage as faith is for the pilgrimage itself; because he is as much called by the effectual grace of God to suffer with Christ here, as he is to reign with him hereafter. By faith he expects, and it is his privilege with full assurance to expect, an exceeding and eternal weight of glory: and he has now received a full title to it for himself in the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. By patience he possesses his soul in that state of fortitude and serenity which is needful to enable him to endure, and to perform all that is appointed for him during the course of the present scene of conflict and temptation; for such, in a greater or less degree, is the whole of the life of faith. It is at once his wisdom and his duty to go forth in the strength of the Lord God; always keeping in stedfast view that this Saviour is engaged to do all for and in him; and there to place his whole dependence for all good, even while he uses the means with the same care as if he expected his happiness ultimately from them. If patience be thus principled by faith, its active and its passive services will be crowned with evangelical success.

Its active services are beautifully described in Hebrews xii. and 1 Corinthians ix., under the idea of a race, in which the strictest temperance, the most steady attention to the rule, and the greatest exertion, are necessary. The pilgrim should unite, what are so rarely found united, the most cool caution of thought, and the most vehement intenseness of spirit;—caution, that he may walk in Christ, deriving all his strength from him, looking to Jesus, and dropping every unnecessary care and delight which result from the most lawful things, so far as experience shall prove them to be contrary to his progress: and intenseness, that his affections may keep their tone and vigour, and, moderate in all things here, be immoderate only in the desire of heavenly glory. In all this the flesh will plead for indulgence, will murmur and faint; and the length and continuance of the service will have a natural tendency to deject the spirit and fix it to the earth. But let him wait from moment to moment for the supply of the Spirit of Christ, while he looks forward to the unutterably glorious issue, and nothing will be too hard for the pilgrim. That glorious promise shall be found true in rich experience, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength:" he shall be strengthened with glorious power.

But the passive services of patience require still higher supplies of the Spirit of Christ. The pilgrim will find himself opposed by three

enemies continually,—the devil, the world, and the flesh: and to endure, without indulging discontent in his spirit or in his practice, is to overcome indeed. To resist the devil, stedfast in the faith, while he goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, and the spirit in anguish is violently impelled to blasphemy, to despair, to execration of God and all goodness; at the same time that it walks in darkness and has no light; is falling on stumbling-blocks continually; finds no resources of comfort from within or without; and has not the cheering dawn of the light of God's countenance to any degree, but the sense of Divine indignation and the horror of atheism by turns possessing the inward man——O God the Saviour, to what sufferings of mind dost thou expose thy dearest servants! Yet when they are thus oppressed by the devil, thou biddest them be patient unto thy coming: thou countest them happy which endure: the patience of Job, and the end of the Lord in his case, are recorded for our instruction. To whom but to Thee, who succourest the tempted with motherly sympathy of soul, can they go in these severe conflicts? Reason is blind, and deserves not to be admitted into their counsels, which they are sure, by repeated experience, she has often betrayed to the enemy. Faith says, "the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy," even while he "wounds with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel

one," for the multitude of their iniquity. But it is chastisement, not destruction; therefore faith says to the soul, In patience wait the happy end. And was faith in thee, O Saviour, ever disappointed? O teach us to trust and to endure; to fear not, neither to be faint-hearted, for the tails of these smoking firebrands. And while we know, that, not Satan's counsels, but Thine, shall stand, we shall reap the most solid good, even from the most terrible assaults of that roaring lion. To endure ourselves, and to be patient under the constant conflicts of inbred corruption; to mortify, through the Spirit, the deeds of the body, continually and without weariness; to find the design of this trial answered to our souls, in improving our relish and quickening our desires for the continuing city, where all shall be perfect rest, and in fixing our souls in simple dependence on the Lord our righteousness alone for our acceptance—this is a mystery indeed, taught by the Holy Ghost alone, and the deepest exercise of any perhaps to the soul, after she has learned to believe through grace. Patience is here the armour: faith, hope, and charity are guarded by her. Faith is preserved in patience; hope through her discharges all her office of looking stedfastly into the world unseen; and charity, while patience possesses the soul, will be enabled to love the Lord, and bless him for all his wholesome dispensations, however severe, which will

terminate in everlasting joy. The necessity of being thus patient with ourselves appears from the circumstances of the saint. The conflict must endure till death. It is his folly to expect here what is not to be obtained: it is his wisdom to expect it hereafter; and patience, with these views, will render him invincible.

But it is not only toward himself that the pilgrim is called on to exercise patience: the evil world, in the midst of which he lives, will daily call on him to discharge the same duty. To be at once preserved from yielding or conforming to the world, and from avenging injuries by word, or even from the allowance of any bitterness of temper, will require that rare mixture of firmness and meekness which is seen to perfection in the man Christ Jesus, and is learned only in his school, by the supply of that Spirit which he received without measure. A patience toward the blessed God his Father is also most diligently to be cultivated by the Christian, under all his chastisements;—that same sort of meek submission which becomes a dutiful son. This is cherished by faith's *distinguishing* view, which sees the Father handling the rod for the good of the child; and her *penetrating* view, which looks forward to an eternity of pleasure resulting from a few moments of pain. The pilgrim is never, in this world, out of the reach of chastisement, because he is never out of the reach of sin; and the twelfth of Hebrews (former part) teaches

him so distinctly on this head, that I shall refer him there for all that is needful on this subject. In the beginning of that passage, mention is made of a great cloud of witnesses, whose example and good success should encourage us to be followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. The example of the blessed Jesus is proposed, among the rest, who endured the cross for the joy set before him. Shall we repine at the ill treatment we meet with from an evil world, or from the devil, its god, when He who made the world had not in it where to lay his head, and expired at last between two thieves, in agony and torment, the scorn and contempt of mankind? And when we consider with what patience and meekness he behaved towards Judas the traitor; and, still more, what grace he bestowed on the bloody persecutor Saul; we see indeed what it is not to be "overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good."

But there is a view in which the propriety of patience still more strongly appears, and the exertion of it exhibits a more noble and august grandeur than any thing, perhaps, that has yet been said will evince. God himself still exercises patience: he daily feeds with his bread, warms with his sun, clothes with his raiment, and every way maintains in his world, thousands of rebel creatures, who trample on his authority, blaspheme his name, oppose his truth, despise his people, and trans-

gress his laws. The Father is not yet avenged for all the indignities shewn to his Son, in his own world: the Son hath yet patience with all his enemies, particularly the great Whore, though drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and the Holy Ghost, though grieved and wearied with the perverseness of men, is daily striving with them, and persuading them into happiness. When the saints, then, cry out, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth," they may well in meekness obey the direction, to "rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also, and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled." The Master himself has yet not justice done him. No man can say how displeasing to the holy nature of God must be the noise of blasphemy, the subtlety of false doctrine, the impudence of profaneness, and the tumult of various wickedness, which replenish the earth: yet he is patient, and proves that he is good, and does good; delighting not in the death of a sinner, but rather willing that all should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. This is the spirit which all pilgrims will partake of: if they indulge any other, they resemble the fiery disciples, who desired to consume the Samaritans, and knew not what manner of spirit they were of. What an honour, for sinful

worms to be embarked in the same cause with the blessed God; meekly waiting, with him, for the redress of their wrongs, and the full vindication both of his character and theirs! At the last day, the Master and his servants shall both be fully avenged; patience shall then have its reward, and wickedness shall cease to lift up its head; but till that time the pilgrim must endure, with God, waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall confirm him unto the end, that he may be blameless. Certainly his union with Christ in spirit and in suffering here, shall be followed with as real an union in judging, triumphing, and reigning hereafter.

Thus, brethren, does it appear in all things, that "the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit." Anger is blind and foolish, sees only the present moment, and is transported into madness for mere trifles; but patience is of a large and provident foresight; and by viewing steadily the counsels of God, and expecting the issue to which he is bringing all things, endures and conquers in meekness and long-suffering. It remains, then, that you who follow the Lamb should follow him in this also. Say not, that you are without strength, and that you cannot get the better of your tempers, and the like; for, in the sense in which these expressions are thus used, the thing is not true. You can, if you please. You should not say, you cannot: rather say, you

will not. Though you have no strength in yourselves, you can do all things through Christ, who will strengthen you. You have no excuse, therefore. Up and be doing the Lord's will, and reap the benefit of it through eternity.

2. I promised also to speak a word to unbelievers, with reference to this subject. You, then, who allow yourselves in bitterness, in impatient and passionate speeches, know that pride is at the bottom of all this. You are lifted up with an excessive idea of yourselves, as if every thing, even the will of God himself, must bend to you. You have no right view of the sovereignty of God, or you would more humbly subject yourselves to his providence: you have no right view of your own sinfulness and need of forgiveness, or you would not bear so hard on those who have offended you: and you are slaves to this world, or you would never suffer your peace to be disturbed continually for the sake of its trifling enjoyments. You, then, who allow your tongues in railing, slandering, and backbiting; who bear malice and hatred in your hearts; who, instead of answering the blessed character of peacemakers, are in a flame about trifles, and labour to incense men against one another; ought to know that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. Even if you profess all the truths of the Gospel, you ought to know that the truth of Christ dwells not at all

in you. If you have no command over your tempers and your tongues, it is a certain proof that the law of Christ has no sway over your souls. "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us:" as you declare, so will it be done unto you:—you forgive not others; you yourselves are not forgiven. I know that you will be ready to plead the strength and violence of your passions: and every man may, as well as you, plead indulgence for his besetting evils in like manner. But if men can be true Christians while sin has dominion over them, there is no iniquity but it may flourish, and still men may assert their right to the privileges of God's children. Where are, then, the promises of the Gospel, "that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust?" Fixed is the declaration, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." There is power in Christ, communicated to all who really believe on him, to subdue their darling corruptions, their strongest evils, as well as those which have not such a particular predominancy in their constitution. You ought to know, then, that the more you profess the Gospel, and the more light you have in your understandings, if you walk not according to that light, you have as yet neither part nor lot in the matter, but only the more sin to answer for. Strike, then, at the

root of your evils; spare yourselves no more. Do not call these hateful tempers your infirmities: disguise them not to yourselves under soft and pretty names. Behold them as black, diabolical evils, directly contrary to the holy nature of God, and evidencing in you a spirit of stubborn pride and rebellion against the Most High. Repent, and bring your sins to Christ, to be crucified with him, that you may look on him whom you have pierced by them, and obtain pardon through his blood, and victory over them by his Spirit. Then rejoice in Christ indeed.

But it must be confessed, that in no one thing does the constitutional frame of some men more differ from that of others than in this very subject. For some are naturally of a phlegmatic, mild, soft, and yielding temper. These are apt to think they have the patience we have described, and, through self-righteous pride, may be too ready to conclude all is well with them. Let such men know, that it may require a principle of Divine grace, a strong and powerful one too, to bring some men to that peaceable, mild, and gentle deportment, which, without any principle of grace, is natural to them. Let them know, that God looks at the heart, and considers how that is principled. Does, then, your meek patient temper (it behoves you seriously to inquire) arise from submission to the will of God, from believing views of the excellency of the Lord Jesus

Christ, and a sense of your own unworthiness and yet of your being freely forgiven all your sins for his sake? Have you any support in it from the considerations of the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, and that scheme of happiness which is steadily carried on by him in the world, and will be completed by him at the last day? Or is it not rather a mere earthly matter, that has nothing to do with God and his Christ, nothing of a spiritual and heavenly nature in it? If it be so, you should surely see, that, though a good temper be a great blessing to you in this world's course of things, it is no evidence at all of your being in a Christian state. If in other respects you live without the fear of God before your eyes, assure yourselves that you are not the children of God. Repent you also, and believe the Gospel, lest you perish equally with the most passionate and the most furious of mankind.

SERMON XVI.

FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY DESCRIBED.

1 COR. xiii. 13.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity.

THE world we live in has ever been, since sin was introduced into it, a scene of misery and vexation of spirit. "Man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain." Nor is there any thing in it that can give rest and satisfaction to the heart, even when every thing succeeds as heart can wish. But, on the other side, disappointments and afflictions give real pain to the mind; and, if a man looks within, the accusations of a guilty conscience, and the torment of lusts and appetites ever craving and unsatisfied, are an endless source of misery. What shall a man do? Will philosophy cure these evils? It has long been boasted of as the great healer of mankind. It never did what it pretended to. Beware of philosophy and vain deceit, is a caution as old as Christianity itself.

There *is* a cure, brethren, for our evils. We preach it, as we can, from Sabbath to Sabbath,

to those who will hear us, and who think it worth while to attend to Sabbath duties;—it is, The pure Gospel of Christ. God knows our miseries to be great, and he has provided a cure large and deep as the evil; and, thanks be to God for the unspeakable gift of his Son! where sin abounded grace has much more abounded. Let us attend to it. Let us forego vain and fruitless inquiries; let us drop all attempts to work ourselves into happiness from our own wisdom, resolution, or contrivances: let us become humble, teachable babes; and let us hear what God has to say to us.

I mean, at present, to fix as I can your attention, and my own, to the way in which the Lord would have us to walk. It lies in the three words *faith*, *hope*, and *charity;* these three; but the last is the greatest of the three: though—mark it, I beseech you!—they are closely connected: we must have all three, if any of them is to do us good. And it is a significant expression, "*abideth.*" The church of Christ in other things is subject to great changes. It is a ship tossed about on the tempestuous sea of the world; and of the fluctuations of that world it must partake. In its outward state it is ever variable. The dispensations of Him whose church it is, are various, suited in infinite wisdom to the circumstances of different seasons. Tongues, prophecies, miracles, have answered their end, and are now no more. But there is something in which the

very vitals of the church consist, without which it cannot live a moment; and that something lies in these three graces, faith, hope, and charity. What they were in the Apostles' time they are now, and must ever be, while Christians are in this world. On these our attention should be fixed: to secure and strengthen these, it behoves all who name the name of Christ to make their grand endeavour. In preaching *we* ought to stick to these, and so should *you* in hearing. In the preservation and increase of these, rests the health of the the church. Art thou a believer in Christ? wouldst thou be healthy and comfortable in the Christian religion? wouldst thou have that which will cheer and support thee in the most trying seasons? Look to it that thou attend to faith, hope, and charity. These are the graces in the exercise of which thou art to experience what a Saviour Christ is for thy own soul. Thou wilt find thyself enabled to go through all thou art called to *with* these; *without* them, every mole-hill will be a mountain, every straw a difficulty.

See the importance of the subject, Christian, and seek for the increase of faith, hope, and charity. Nay, be not distracted with endless cares. It is the art of Satan to keep thee wearying thyself in the fire for very vanity: any thing he will allow thee to do, but to believe, to hope, and to love in a Christian manner. Yet these are the very things thou art called to do: here

is to be thy strength for all trials and duties. See to them, and they will see to every thing else. A truly healthy, thriving frame of soul cannot possibly be without them.—And, unconverted men, the subject calls on you with the voice of necessity. You are without Christian faith, hope, and charity, and must seek for the beginnings of them in your souls, if you mean not to perish.

I have opened the subject in general, and its uses. A few particulars must be distinctly spoken to, to give it weight and application.

1. Let us answer the question, What are faith, hope, and charity? Let us not evade it, by saying, we all know that. Do we so? Very many do not, in the theory and notion; still more do not by any experimental power. *Do you* know what they are, who are ready to say, every one knows them? Examine yourselves, and see if you do.

(1st.) Faith.—This is the root of Christianity. It lies lowest. To believe in Christ, indeed, requires, in the order of things, a conviction of sin and danger going before. No man can believe in Christ who is not a lost sinner in his own eyes. All men, whatever their character be, need this conviction: it is the Spirit's first work in religion. Therefore, wherever Christ's Gospel comes, if there is to be an outpouring of the Spirit to accompany it in the conversion of sinners, men are disciplined by inward teaching to know themselves corrupt

and altogether evil, condemned by the holy law of God, and helpless under the power of sin and the devil. Whoever is not brought to this, but thinks he is a good man, or can with ease make himself a good man when he pleases, he is not fit for Christ, and is as far from him as possible. The goodness he thinks of, is only civil, outward, moral goodness; it is not humility, the love of God, and heavenly dispositions. When, then, the Spirit of God has so far blessed the faithful preaching of the Law to a people, that they are thus pricked in heart, and cry, What shall we do? then is the time for faith to appear and to shew its value. The Acts of the Apostles describe things in this way. So, when Felix desired to hear Paul concerning the faith of Christ, the Apostle knew that it was to no purpose to teach what belonged to the faith till the hearer's conscience was disturbed by a sense of sin: he preached to him of righteousness, temperance, and of judgment to come; and Felix trembled. Had he persevered in seeking duly, he might have been led right; but, "Go thy way for this time!" Ah, how oft has this been done by many half-convinced sinners, who thus are robbed of an interest in Christ! Let conviction proceed till men be dead to the law, slain by it, cut off from all hope; till they say, there is no hope, and repent earnestly, as in the Confession, "There is no health in us." When this is the case, they are fit for the

instruction of the faith of Christ; and when much of this humbling work is carrying on, the Lord with his grace fails not to appear in due season. Christ came, he says himself, "to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

Now, brethren, you may understand what faith is. It is the coming of the soul, thus lost, to Jesus. It is the casting of all its burdens on him; giving glory to God by him; and receiving him as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; not only for pardon and peace, but also for wisdom, joy, love, comfort, patience—all heavenly blessings, in earnest here, in fulness hereafter. And its essence is to rest on him only: faith is totally lost if any thing be mixed with Christ. To finish this first member; By faith the sinner, now returning to God through Christ, is justified, and enters into an everlasting covenant with him as his Father.

(2d.) Hope is soon explained: it is the effect of faith. The believer rejoices in hope of the glory of God; he hopes for that he sees not, and so in patience waits for it. And a blessed grace it is, to make a man cheerful in trouble; because God, being his Father, will make all work for his good, and bring him by and bye out of the reach of evil. How divinely suitable are faith and hope to the relief of the soul!

They, in Christ, take away guilt, and fear, and heaviness.

(3d.) But love, the last of the three, which cannot be where faith is not, is the very heaven of the soul. God is love—heaven is love. We cannot conceive happiness to be in any other way but love. Sincere love to God and our neighbour, springing from faith, how excellent, to calm the passions of the sinful soul in this life, to give patience, composure, humility, a right temper toward God and toward our neighbour, whether friend or foe! And how fit is he who by faith is justified from all his sins, by hope rejoices and waits for that which he sees not, and by love glorifies his God and profits his neighbour, living not for himself any more—how fit is he to abound in good works, and to have peace and comfort living and dying! Surely, whoever understands aright this doctrine must see it to be Divine. It cannot be of the earth; the wisdom of man could never invent it. The Gospel is proved thus to be of God; and he who really believes, hopes, and loves, has the witness in himself.

2. I infer from the subject the care requisite to distinguish true faith, hope, and charity from counterfeits; for there are many, very many, who are utterly destitute of them all, who yet have no doubt but they are possessed of them. I speak to all careless people, who are walking in the ways of their own hearts, and indulging the lusts and desires of nature, with

no notion of self-denial, unacquainted with the depth of wickedness that is in their hearts, and who neither love nor practise any thing of a Divine and heavenly nature. Let me not miss the way to their hearts.—O Saviour! guide the word of conviction to their souls: thine arrows are sharp. Let these men feel their want of Thee, and not deceive themselves to their ruin.

If one ask you, Do you believe in God, believe in Christ, believe the articles of Christian faith? "Oh yes," you say; "we always have had a good and sound Christian faith: we have been brought up in it, and have always been Christians." I ask you further, Have you a good hope toward God? "Oh yes," you say; "God forbid we should despair of God's mercies; we hope to be saved." (And so common is this hope, that, "As I hope to be saved," is a familiar vain oath of many.) Well: and have you charity? do you love God? and are you charitable to your neighbour? "Oh yes," you say; "we can hardly think it possible for any to be so wicked as to hate God; and we never bear malice against any, and are ready to do all the good we can to our neighbour."—I may not lightly pass over this matter. Oh the power of self-deceit! How men are blinded by it! I beseech you consider; there must be some dreadful mistake somewhere. The world we live in, it is confessed, is very wicked. Immense mischief is committed every where.

Nations, towns, families, groan under the curse of sin. How far men love God, is proved by the overflowings of Sabbath profanations among us. And the horrors of war, and distractions of quarrels, and the bitterness of party disputes, and the complaints of men's unreasonable selfishness—of other people's selfishness, not of our own—these things shew how far men love their neighbour. Men may be said, indeed, to love themselves, in some sense, as they love to gratify their lusts and passions; which is done without shame or remorse by thousands, who care not what grief or pain they put others to thereby. Add, to all this evidence of the immense wickedness and general depravity of mankind, the Scripture account, that the road to destruction is broad, and many walk in it. Who is it, then, that does all this mischief? If we examine separately and distinctly the whole multitude of mankind, each one professes himself to have faith, hope, and charity. If it be really so, each has that which makes him a Christian, and a really good man: for, if the faith be unfeigned, the hope solid, and the charity sincere, there wants nothing more to make even as good a man as you take St. Paul to be—only that he had these qualities in an eminent degree;—but whoever has a real measure of these graces, though imperfect and still a sinner in many respects, he has the essence of true religion, and no sin has dominion over him. It is impossible that the world

could be so full of evil and mischief as it is, if this were the case.

I pray you look forward to the day of judgment. Many will say in that day, 'Lord, have we not done so and so?' and yet, "I know you not....depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity," will be the answer of the Judge, which will confound the very many pretenders to faith, hope, and charity. Now, conscience, do thine office faithfully on these men. Let this and that man—every one whose life evidences against him—know, that he is not only wanting in a just degree of faith, hope, and charity, but also that he has none at all. "The true dependence is,"—I use the words of holy Bernard: even in his dark age he had a light which may shame the ignorance of many called Protestants,—"when a man abandons himself, and relies on his Lord; otherwise, the trusting to our own merits is no reliance, but rather distrust." This is your case: with all your pretences to faith, you trust not in Christ, but in yourselves; knowing nothing of your own sinfulness, that should move you to come to Christ for salvation. Learn to know that your faith, hope, and charity are on the false foundation of nature. You are without the new birth: you support yourselves on natural grounds and principles. Know, that, in order to have the true faith, hope, and charity which were described in the last article, you must be brought to understand the doctrines of the

Gospel; you must know what in-dwelling sin means; how helpless, damnable, blind, and corrupt your nature is; you must know what it is to be illuminated by the Holy Spirit, to be made new creatures, and justified by faith in Christ.

Enough has been said to shew you at present to be without faith, hope, and charity. Search the Scriptures and your own hearts; and pray for light, and attend to the preaching of the Gospel, that you may be made wise to salvation, by faith in Christ Jesus. A great point is gained (have I gained it on you? the Lord do for you what I cannot!) if you be once convinced that your faith is dead, your hope vain, and your charity hypocritical. Once convinced of this, you will no longer go on in that careless way you do at present. He who is brought off from false foundations, will seek to be placed on a true one. And, now that you are warned how deceitful all your present professions of religion are, rest not till you know the faith, hope, and charity of the new creature in Christ by your own experience, that you perish not in your sins.

3. I am hence led also to point out what are the just and solid evidences of a converted state. They lie in three words,—faith, hope, and charity. The Apostle beheld in the Thessalonians the work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus; and hence knew their election of God. Wouldst thou

prove thyself one of the elect people of God? Ask, whether, having been brought off from the ground of nature, and abandoned *thyself*, as Bernard significantly speaks in the passage I quoted, thou hast indeed fled for refuge to Jesus, and glorifiest the love, grace, wisdom, holiness, and faithfulness of God, in a firm reliance on him as all thy wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Has this made thee to rejoice in hope of the glory of God; to glory in tribulation also, with a hope that maketh not ashamed? Hence, also, does love constrain thee? Art thou led into the secret of true obedience, faith working by love; so that, by virtue of love and gratitude to God thy Father, and Christ thy Saviour, and the Holy Ghost thy Comforter, thou canst now give thy heart up to God in love; and for the sake of Christ canst love his brethren, yea all men, even thine enemies; so that all the selfish and bitter passions have no longer dominion? I know, if thou be a real Christian, thou wilt condemn thyself, and be ashamed of thy poor progress, and wilt often cry out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Yet the beginnings of this real work of sanctification may be seen and known. Since thou knewest the Lord Jesus, and tastedst of his grace, surely thy feelings, desires, hopes, fears, and all thy motions in religion, are vastly different from what they were before: thou believest, thou hopest, and thou lovest. Beau-

tiful, divine religion! that a poor soul, who cannot deal with God as a Judge at all, is called on to deal with him as a Father! "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." Thou art to believe him to be thy Father, through the grace of Jesus. Dost thou not receive him as such, though with fear and trembling, and the deepest sense of unworthiness? Yet thou art to trust in him, to hope all good from him, and to love him supremely; and for his sake to love his church and his creatures. What a provision for the happiness of wretched men! How suitable to the wants of the humble soul! What objection can any make to such a religion as this? It is thine, O thou who lovest the salvation of the Lord: and may all that seek him be joyful and glad in him; may such as love his salvation say continually, The Lord be magnified. Though thou art poor and needy, yet the Lord careth for thee. He is thy help, and thy deliverer: rest in him, call on his name, and exercise the faith, hope, and charity thou hast, till he make them strong.

4. And, remember, this is to be thy work through life. Remember, these three "abide." No true religion without them. Thy soul will thrive, and thou wilt be fitted for all thou art called to in this stormy world, and no difficulty will overcome thee, if faith, hope, and charity stand their ground.

5. And here let us learn to know how it is that love is the greatest of the three. This must not be understood as if faith were to be thrown away as of little consequence. On the contrary, faith worketh by love: if faith be not exercised, love cannot exist. But the superior excellence of love lies in this, that whereas faith will by and by be swallowed up in sight, and hope in enjoyment, love will for ever remain the same; it being the end, the aim, the happiness itself, to which faith and hope lead us. That which is the end itself, must be more valuable than the means leading to it. I cannot conceive how angels, who never fell, can have any nobler, happier, or higher employment than love, love of their God and of his creatures. This is bliss; the Scripture points out this to us as bliss; and the Divine description of charity in this chapter gives us no higher idea of happiness. Therefore it is that love is so much to be preferred to knowledge. Knowledge, in so ignorant a creature as man, hardly deserves the name. When the saint arrives at heaven he will put it off, as a grown-up man does childish things. But love, which is only to be learned by the faith and hope of the Gospel, will remain the same, only perfected, and that for ever. In the mean time, how comely and blessed a thing must the real Christian religion be, which, in the exercise of three such graces

as these, sweetens and enobles our nature, and provides cordials for the miseries of life! Are things seen very disagreeable? but faith presents us with things not seen, delightful and glorious. Are present things grievous? yet, by hope, in patience a Christian waits for that which he sees not. Is the world evil; and is the temper tried a thousand ways by the frowardness of men? oh what a Divine thing is true charity, which hopes, endures, and believes all things; not seeking her own, not puffed up, not suspicious of evil, not vaunting itself, not easily provoked, suffering long, and kind! Thus a real believer is supplied by grace with that which will enable him to go through the duties which, in a world like this, he must discharge with difficulty and self-denial, till he be enabled, in the next life, to practise the same love, without difficulties, in perfect bliss for ever. In the mean time, love, which is stronger than death, is the element of the Christian. In spite of a thousand temptations to think hardly of God, he can in humble love trust the wisdom and care of his heavenly Father, and leave to him to clear up all.

Lastly. Christians, look to Jesus, and out of his fulness be supplied with strength to follow his example. He trusted in his Father when overwhelmed with agony: he endured the cross, despising the shame, for the hope of the

joy set before him: and his love——who can describe it? It is thy salvation, Christian, that his love is unmeasurable. Imitate him in faith, hope, and charity; and when thou awakest up after his likeness thou shalt be satisfied.

SERMON XVII.

EXPOSITION OF PSALM CXXII.

PSALM CXXII.

I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together: whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord. For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good.

THIS is a Psalm equally remarkable for the piety and the charity which it breathes. To enter into the beauties of it, and to relish it aright, we ought to possess something of the frame and spirit of the holy writer. David, the undoubted penman of the Psalm, felt his own heart enlarged with the love of God and his church. There was a comeliness and a beauty, in his eyes, in spiritual objects, which lifted up his soul above self and the world;

and when he heard of any expressing a desire to go into the house of the Lord, he rejoiced.

"*I was glad,*" he begins, "*when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.*"— It must be so, particularly with those whose love of God is warm and strong, as was that of the man after God's own heart. What we love much ourselves, we are glad to find others love also. Hence even drunkards rejoice in the society of drunkards: and he who loves the Lord and his worship, as he is grieved to see persons cold and negligent in their attentions to Divine things and all alive for the world; so is he sincerely glad to see a spirit of inquiry among his neighbours in the things of God; to find men beginning to seek God with earnestness, and attending on the ordinances of his religion as matters of real importance. It is highly agreeable, to one who has himself tasted that the Lord is gracious, to hear men encouraging and exhorting one another to go into the house of the Lord. For, however others may think lightly of the subject, to him it is of the last importance, being connected with heavenly things. It is like seeing men encouraging one another to climb up to heaven. What though the road be strait and difficult, yet God himself, in Christ, will be with the travellers, and their end shall be everlasting peace and joy. It is true, there may be too many attendants on Divine worship who are mere formalists, and are no better for their

attendance. Nevertheless, wherever a spirit of religious inquiry is excited, and men attend with zeal to the offices of piety, there is strong reason to hope that there some life of godliness is among them; and therefore every good man will, with David, rejoice when men say, "Let us go into the house of the Lord." On the contrary, the practice of encouraging one another to frequent houses of pleasurable amusement, awfully shews in men a spirit opposite to God, and leads them in general far from him, even to the regions of destruction.

"*Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.*"—The benevolent Psalmist joins himself with others, and expresses with them the pleasure of the heart in seeing an united people worshipping God, according to his own ordinances, in his own chosen city, in his own house,—an emblem of the church of God in all ages; joining to worship God in the Spirit, through the one Mediator, Jesus; all breathing and panting after the Jerusalem which is above, which is free, and the mother of them all; the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; where are the innumerable company of angels, the spirits of just men made perfect, and Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant. The ancient Jerusalem was a shadow of all this; and when the Psalmist adds,

"*Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together;*" or, as you have it in the

Prayer-book translation, "*that is at unity in itself:*" you see, in the harmony and beauty of king David's chief city at that time, an emblem of the church of Christ, both as it now is here on earth, at peace, and in love and unity among its members, with one mind and one mouth glorifying God, and like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus; and as it will hereafter be in heaven, in its perfection, where Jesus shall appear the first-born among many brethren.

"*Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord.*"— The twelve tribes went up to Jerusalem three times a-year, to present themselves to God, and to express their grateful acknowledgments to him as their God in covenant. The "testimony of Israel," which they went to, means, I apprehend, what in Moses's writings is called the ark of the testimony, the grand symbol of the Divine presence, which was preserved in the sanctuary. All this shadows out to us the just pattern of the real church of Christ, in which men meet, all to glorify one God through one Mediator, Jesus; to express their firm dependence on him; their thankful acknowledgment of his redeeming love; their union with one another as brethren; and their common hope, through grace, of appearing before God in the house above, as his children in Christ Jesus.

"*For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David.*"—The king there ministered judgment and justice to the people, and there every oppressed Israelite might find relief and redress. So the Lord Jesus is King of his church; the government of it is "upon his shoulder: of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever." The sacred writer, struck with the beauty and glory of the Divine grace and government, and knowing on whom alone it depended to preserve all this happiness, and how easily the corruptions and wickedness of men deface the harmony of the church, adds,

"*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good.*"—Here you see in David a genuine taste for Divine worship, and a spirit enlarged with charity, embracing with affection and delight all the members of the church of Christ; joying in their prosperity, praying and labouring for it. He exhorts others to pray for the peace of Jerusalem: he assures us, that those who love the church shall prosper themselves. This it is to follow God, whose name is Love. This

it is to answer the end of his redeeming grace in Christ Jesus, and of all the illuminating and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, that men, who by sin and the Fall are separated from God, and disjoined from one another in selfishness and pride, being recovered in Christ to peace and unity, first with God, and then with one another, might walk in love. I can go no farther than this in the ideas of heaven: only there love will be perfect, and have every possible advantage of every kind. Every saint will pray for the same things, and will do so, not only for his own sake, but for his brethren and companions' sakes, who are his neighbours, and whom he loves as himself. And because of his affection to the Lord's house and his cause and glory, he will not only pray for, but actively lay himself out for, the good of the church, and delight to promote its welfare.

The Psalm has been considered. I would lay it before you as a pattern of a frame of heart godly and beneficent, full of zeal for the true religion of the Bible, and, for the church of God, ardently bent on promoting its prosperity. By the length of time that we have a number of us professed the Gospel of Christ, it highly becomes us to seek to grow in this spirit. It is an heavenly spirit. You will own we need it much, brethren. O send thy Holy Ghost, Heavenly Father, " and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of cha-

rity, the very bond of peace, and of all virtues; without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee."

A few inferences shall now be attended to, deducible from the subject.

1. A high regard for public worship, and a delight in seeing it encouraged among men, is the first thing that strikes us from the beginning of the Psalm, as a touchstone by which men may see what manner of spirit they themselves are of. When persons have crowded to God's word and ordinances, are you delighted? Does it please you, as an evidence of the love and desire of heavenly things being among them, and a hopeful symptom that souls are travelling together to heaven? If you are duly delighted with these things, it is a sign your own taste is there also. But if in your religion you love solitude, and are selfish, and have no delight in meeting with the people of God; or if you are filled with envy at seeing the multitudes, as the Jews of old were; I must say you have struck out of *your* creed one article of the *Apostles'* Creed, the communion of saints. I know of no such spirit in the real church of Christ; and if you fancy yourselves above the need of social religion, in pride and scornfulness, as if in private you could edify yourselves better than in public, take care you sink not from your height even into hell itself. Brethren, attend closely to private religion, but along with this keep up

the communion of saints. Heaven is not solitary: charity reigns among the sons of God.

2. I observe also from the Psalm, the excellency of a spirit of unity in the children of God. Our feet shall stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together. There the tribes go up to worship God in his sanctuary, where the ark of the testimony is preserved, to give thanks to the name of the Lord; and there judgment and justice are administered by the house of David. Translate all this into New-Testament language, and it intimates, according to the relation established between the type and the substance, that God's church, which he purchased with his own blood, is one. The members are all brethren of one family, having all privileges in common. They resolve here, therefore, to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. A close, compact body of people, having all one Father, one Saviour, one Comforter; separated to God, and peculiarly distinguished from the evil world, they will join in one worship of one God, and keep themselves united under one Prince and Law-giver, the Son of David, Christ Jesus, the King of them all. What an advantage unity is to any society is well known: it must be so to the church of God, the principle of love being that which cements their union with one another; and by reason of this union the whole body thrives, or, to speak apostolically,

"maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." For love is their health, their joy, their happiness: and when they come to the Jerusalem above, the felicity of heaven will be multiplied exceedingly by the perfect oneness of the church, all in Christ Jesus their Head united to one another in a bond never to be dissolved. "Love one another," therefore, is the repeated charge of Christ and his Apostles to his church. A selfish, proud, malicious, separating spirit is what is natural to fallen man; and he gains by it only misery. Indeed, Christ's people must separate from the wicked. Love them, and do them good, they should by all ways; but the love of intimacy and complacency of a more endearing nature belongs to real Christians one among another. This is, indeed, to breathe the air of heaven beforehand; and this is the surest proof of growth in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. It is in this frame that the Psalmist recommends the principle of unity to the church; and oh that all who profess to know any thing of Christ shewed the same in their conduct and their whole demeanour!

3. There are two ways in which this spirit of love may evidence itself (as, in truth, to profess it, and yet to shew nothing of it in action, is but hypocrisy)—by fervent prayers, and by active endeavours. A word on each of them will be proper here. The former is thus expressed, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:

they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee." That you may more distinctly apply these things, brethren, consider a little the state of religion among ourselves, even in this place in which we live. It is a common thing for persons to take it for granted that they have religion enough and charity enough, and to give scarcely any proof of either; only we must believe them that they are religious and charitable, because they say they are so. Proof, I say, must be given, if we would not deceive ourselves with vain hopes, and find ourselves wofully deceived at the day of judgment. I know many look on the state of the church of Christ as one of the least and most contemptible of all objects. Politics, trade, pleasures, these things glitter in their eyes, and engage their attention and conversation; but the state of godliness appears of little consequence to them, if even the very term godliness can escape their derision and contempt. It will not be so in the next life: these worldly scenes will vanish, and godliness and ungodliness will divide the whole race of mankind into two bodies, distinct, and distinctly ranged, for ever; one in happiness, and the other in misery. There is a church in this place, I mean of true Christians, though not all of one denomination, whether such as you I have been speaking of

have attended to it or not; and here in these last days God has shewn his glory;—a number of souls, notwithstanding the blemishes and imperfections to which they are incident, redeemed from among men, devoted to God, living by faith in the Son of God, humble, and renouncing their own righteousness; men whom no earthly things can satisfy, who feed on Christ the bread of life. You may see them living quite different sorts of lives, with superior views, and in their whole character quite distinct, from the people of the world: they are spiritual and heavenly: they tread in the steps of Christ; and are heirs, through hope, of his kingdom: his Spirit in them witnesses that they are his. Now, as matter of self-examination whether you have the real Christian charity, I ask you, Do you pray for these people? They are called "Jerusalem" in the Psalm. Do you love them? do you say from the bottom of the heart, "Peace be within them?" do you employ yourselves in sincere prayer to God that he would give them peace and plenteousness, make them to thrive in grace, and bring forth plenteously the fruit of good works? Is this your disposition toward them? Are these your brethren and companions? Then you are passed from death to life, because you love the brethren. You could not do so, except you partook of their spirit and were of their number. Do you desire that their spiritual state may grow ex-

ceedingly; and does it pain you to see any thing going on among them amiss? All this shews your charity; and these being your feelings, you pray for them freely; and loving them, you shall doubtless prosper yourselves: as, on the other side, those who pray not thus, but rather rejoice if any thing goes wrong in the church, and dislike and envy it, shew themselves to be in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. This manner of self-examination I would earnestly recommend to my audience.

The other way of shewing charity is by actual service: "Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good." Do you so? Do you succour the tempted; help forward the young of the flock; encourage and support them in the heavenly road; support the spirit of Christian religion with your purse, your labour, your advice, as you can; shew yourselves active friends to the cause of God in the world; are not ashamed to bear reproach for Christ's sake; assist the ministers and friends of Christ in their work, and the like? You shew what a blessed spirit you are of. And *you* shew a contrary spirit, who can make a jest of God's people, formerly perhaps for years despising and maltreating them, now treating them with cold indifference; doing nothing for Christ's cause in the world; ready to discourage rather than help young people in the care of their souls. You yourselves

need conversion. Charity will both pray and act; you do neither.

To apply, then, the whole subject (1st) to the church of God, and (2dly) to its enemies—

(1.) Do you profess to belong to the church, own its doctrines and cause and people in the world? Remember, there are tares among the wheat. We have all need to reflect, that many will say "Lord, Lord," at that day, to whom he will answer, "I know you not." Oh cultivate, brethren, a close acquaintance with Christ, the great Head and Life of the church, by faith. See that you know him and put your trust in him, for he never faileth them that seek him. And faith worketh by love: you cannot, having tasted of his grace, but love his brethren, with all their imperfections. And this love you should exercise by kindness, and by all the endearing methods of Christian friendship. Let the children of God keep united and firm to one another. Keep true to Christ your King, and to each other, as brethren. Covet not particular intimacies with profane persons: they will cost you dear if you do: can one handle coals, and not be burnt? And, after all, if you have real love to Christ, the world will not love you. The world crucified your Master; believe it not, though it speak fair words; it no more loves his church than it did him. Do good to your enemies; pray for and exercise charity in all ways you can to all men; but

reserve intimacy to the church of God. O how happy, were God's people, like Jerusalem, compacted together; all praying for and seeking the good of the whole; a peculiar people in the world, so that they might be distinctly known as the salt of the earth and the light of the world! And surely it should be so. You are all of one family; have all one hope of salvation, Christ Jesus; are all beat off from confidence in any thing else; and are all strangers here, travelling to the same heavenly country, under the influence of the same Holy Spirit, with desires and affections quite distinct from the world; and are all to meet in the end, to be ever with the same Lord. What motives for love, sympathy, brotherhood! But if you feel these motives, shew that you do so by preserving and promoting peace and good-will among the brethren. Forbearance and forgiveness, in this world of infirmity, must be mutual; and you should labour after these things, and not keep up ill-will in your hearts, but consider Christ's brethren as your brethren: for if you give way to a spirit of malice, you may be so blinded by selfishness or passion, as to justify your ill-humours by charging them with hypocrisy without cause, and casting them off uncharitably, not because you see them to have offended God, but merely because they have offended you. The benefit of this union is great: it bids the fairest to keep off the intrusions of Satan, and to be the

means of promoting the cause of God in the world. It is the rending of Christ's church into factions, and the loss of mutual charity, that effectually break up the health of the church. I pray you, brethren, guard against these evils. "If there be any consolation in Christ, any comfort of love, any fellowship of the Spirit, any bowels and mercies, be of one accord, of one mind." It is not the love of a particular party or denomination that is meant and so warmly recommended in the Scriptures: on the contrary, a party, separating spirit, is one of the greatest destroyers of charity. Do not you see how it is with those who deal the most largely that way? How narrow, how bigotted, how attached to words of vain jangling; how apt to split hairs, and to wrangle on points of no moment; how earnest to make converts to their own party; how they lie on the catch for this, and at the same time how deplorably unfeeling with respect to what St. Paul calls the care of all the churches; how unconcerned about the promotion of godliness, and how unready to help it in the least, except so far as suits their own line exactly; how contemptuous of the brightest and best characters in the church of Christ, and how apt to idolize, and even ridiculously to set up above all others, some preacher or writer who belongs to them. Alas! this is not love of the brethren; this is selfishness: and those who take pains to rend Christ's body,

which should be one, and to increase the number of sects and divisions—which are too many, alas, already—must answer at the day of judgment for the wounding of charity which they occasion in the church of Christ. This, then, is not the charity recommended by David, who would have our feet to stand within the gates of Jerusalem, and keep the church compact together. I cannot but look on it as a great evil that ever Christians were divided into different denominations. Nevertheless, where love and discretion reign, sincere charity may prevail, as it always should, among godly people of different denominations; but all discreet and charitable souls will do their utmost to prevent any further divisions.

Nor is the charity of the text the spirit of universal benevolence, and the disposition to promote the good of mankind at large. There are some persons by no means possessed of the humility, faith, hope, and charity of the Gospel, who yet, being of humane, generous tempers, are very ready to promote the temporal interests of their fellow-creatures. Very commendable spirit, much to be encouraged. Happy were the church of Christ always the foremost in it! Yet I must distinguish this from the love of the brethren this day spoken of. A man quite profane may be thus generous. Christians, be not deceived by it, nor led to enter hereby, to the great peril of your souls, into intimacies with humane people who fear not God.

I scarcely need to add, that the charity before us is not a mere love of one's own natural relations and family: this is far too confined; and under the cover of this, and often with the pretence of this, a spirit of covetousness prevails destructive of all charity. Where trade abounds, as in this country, what need have Christians to beware here! How often does rivalship in business so blind and besot the judgment, as to take away all charity between persons who profess godliness! And, in general, the greedy spirit of gain, and the habit of reducing every thing to calculations of profit and loss, which prevail in places of much trade, are apt to sap the foundations of Christian unity, peace, and love; and to freeze and deaden the souls of professors. This is, in short, the greatest discouragement in our ministry among professors which we meet with. We can but speak against it. O do Thou, who hadst not where to lay thy head when on earth, look down from thy glory, as Thou art the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and shame, or rebuke, or convince thy own people of the great evil of selfishness and covetousness, and open their hearts to mutual charity; make them content with a little of the world, and teach them to press more earnestly after the true riches.

(2.) Enemies of the Church.—I call you so who live in open sin and profaneness; not only such of you as make a mock at all godliness,

but such as evidently neglect it, and think yourselves above paying any regard to it; who look on religion as a thing quite out of your way and line. You might read this Psalm by the method of contraries, all the way through. You are not glad when there is a spirit of religious and serious attendance on Divine ordinances in the place you live in: such of you as are far advanced in life may remember how you opposed and scoffed at it, when the Spirit of God was poured out in this place. Your feet do not gladly stand in the church, but in the gaming-house, the tavern, or places of pleasure and vanity. You have nothing to do with the unity and lovely order of Christ's church, and partake not of its health and spirit: your society is with Satan's people. You neither pray nor labour for the good of the church; you have not begun to pray and labour for your own. All the use I can make of the Psalm for you, is to convince you that you are void of the essential characters of true godliness. Be assured, that you must experience an entire change of heart, or you will never enter into the house of God which is above, nor will your feet ever stand within the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem.

SERMON XVIII.

THE CHARGE OF GOD TO ABRAHAM.

GENESIS xvii. 1.

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God: walk before me, and be thou perfect.

THE relation of Father and son, which the blood of Jesus, through faith, cements between God Almighty and a poor sinful human worm, is a real relation, and is always attended with its due properties,—on the Father's side, with fatherly kindness; on the son's, with dutiful obedience. I shall endeavour, first, to open the true meaning of this weighty and comprehensive precept; secondly, to illustrate it a little by the conduct of Abraham; and, thirdly, to apply the subject before us.

1. The command, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect," bears a particular respect to the two names of the blessed God set forth in the text, rendered in our translation the "Almighty God;" but more faithfully and exactly rendered the "all-bountiful One every

where present." If He is all-bountiful, or shedding and pouring forth all good, a strong reason indeed is couched in His name for our walking before him with perfect hearts; seeing He only can fill us with good, we need no other benefactor than Himself, and none else deserves to be served with the whole heart. Likewise, if He is every where present, if none can hide themselves from His view, we ought to walk as in His presence, ever setting Him before us, as intimately conscious of our inmost thoughts and all our ways, and ever at hand to bless his friends and to punish his enemies. "I am the all-bountiful, the omnipresent One: walk before me, and be thou perfect."

The first member, "Walk before me," or Walk in my sight, expresses the setting of God before us in all our conduct, as observing us, and being really present with us. It is observed of the wicked, that they know not the Lord: they are so proud that they care not for God, neither is God in all their thoughts. They say to the Almighty, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." Hence all unconverted men shun those thoughts and that conversation which would bring God into near view. You may easily see how in conversation they flee from it; they cannot bear it; guilt, enmity, and terror keep them at a distance. Not so Abram, and those who, with Abram, walk with God.

They are his children: his all-bounteous grace and his omnipresence engage them at once to dutiful reverence of his all-seeing eye, and a jealous fear of offending him, who ever sees and observes their goings; and also to a confident, affectionate, child-like dependence on his power, wisdom, and goodness, ever engaged in their behalf. And this walking in his sight is carried on by that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. By this, God is realized to their souls, and his presence has a lively, steady, practical influence. Faith in an unseen God and Father supplies the place of sight. Hence, fear of evil is overcome; their Father is present to save them;—fear of sinning is established in the soul; their Father ever sees, and will be displeased. And hence, only, the fear of man and the walking before men, is overcome. The unconverted, not placing God before their eyes, place men before them. To please them; to seek in words and deeds to keep up a decent appearance, and make a regard for character the grand end of their dealings with one another; this is the way of the world: and hence the thousand thousand empty speeches, to the great abuse of language, with which men abound toward one another: hence the great pains taken to appear well, to look well, in our conversation and conduct, and the little regard paid therein to the will of God, the little or no sense of His all-seeing eye. The

want of faith in God causes this; and till men obtain that faith which realizes God and supplies the place of sight, they are slaves to the world's opinion of them. The knowledge of God once obtained—of God in Christ, as all-bountiful to fill the soul, as every where present, at once to protect and to observe us—this will make men and worldly things appear little; we shall be led to walk before God, and not before men; our care and fear will now take a different turn; and thus walking with God in faith, we shall walk as his sons and daughters, and He will smile on us as a Father, and make known his love to bless us, and his authority to awe us. Hence we shall be led to the spirit of the latter part of the text, "And be thou perfect"—that is, upright and sincere—with an undivided heart observing all the commands of God, one as well as another, in loving obedience to him as our Father. This follows from walking before God: whereas, those who walk before men will practise some fashionable virtues, but no unfashionable ones, and in all they do are void of sincerity toward God, in which lies the true perfection of a Christian's obedience attainable in this life, so long as he has a mortal body and sin dwells in him. For there are those for whose sakes I dare not deal slightly in this matter. It must not be dissembled, that an obedience far short of a sinless one, an obedience of sincere love, is

acceptable and well-pleasing to God, for the sake of Christ. But whose obedience? That of those who have fled to Jesus, and are justified, and look to be justified, from first to last, only in the name of the Lord Jesus; who are broken in spirit on account of sin; who mourn over their in-dwelling sin, allow it not, deny it, and mortify it, through the Spirit, all their days: so far are they from allowing or pleading for sin. And what they call and feel to be sin, and which those who understand them not aright, when they cry out against it, may take to be some gross indulgence of wickedness, is the sin of their nature, which they deny in constant practice, and which the greater part of men feel not at all, through ignorance of themselves. This is the perfection of obedience meant in the text: not that for which we are justified—that is, the righteousness of Christ—but it is that upright walk with God which a believer, who is already justified, ought ever to maintain. Let no man, on the one hand, presume to sin that grace may abound. What I have said of an universal sincerity of obedience in love, which excludes from the number of God's children all who live in any known sin, surely gives all needful discouragement to licentiousness in religion. And let no sincere walker with God be discouraged on account of those sinful feelings and unallowed wanderings which are his daily burden; seeing he loves his Lord; is waiting for a

more perfect scene of things hereafter; and the blood of Jesus so cleanses him from all unrighteousness that God his Father will use him as a father; will pity his child who loves him; will not be rigorous toward him, seeing he is not under the law, but under grace; but (to use Malachi's beautiful expression) will spare him, "as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." And this view of things is absolutely necessary for the peace and comfort of the most eminent saints on earth; and, to the praise of the glory of God's grace, it is scriptural: Old and New Testament agree thus to represent the matter; for "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not," saith Solomon. "In many things we offend all," saith St. James. To be "led by the Spirit" on the whole, and "through the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the body," this is St. Paul's view. And St. John's "perfect love which casteth out fear," is that very spirit which I have described, of universal sincerity toward God in a man's general conduct. We are told of Solomon, that "his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father;" yet, surely, he who should deeply examine David's life will find faults, some grievous faults; but yet none, the Holy Ghost being witness, that exclude him from the character of a sincere lover of his God: of Solomon, who fell into idolatry, this can by no means be said. It is said of Asa, "his

heart was perfect all his days." Precious, glorious character! Yet he who shall read the sixteenth chapter of the 2d of Chronicles will find him far removed from a sinless state.

This matter, both for the instruction of the ignorant and for the comfort of the sincere, needed some little explanation. But he who should think that I mean to encourage sin, would widely mistake my intention: I mean to encourage holiness. I would to God all who profess Christ Jesus were in possession of this sincere spirit of obedience, and walked before God as Abraham did. Sincerity may seem a little thing to some; but to be sincere toward God, to love him with an undivided heart, and for his sake to mortify our sinful nature all our days, this is a rare attainment indeed: and to grow in it more and more is still rarer. However, no insincere nor divided heart shall enter into heaven: without holiness—real, sincere, universal, in all its parts—no man shall see the Lord.

2. Let us now, secondly, look at the prince of the faithful, and see how he walked before God with a perfect heart.

You first behold him, in obedience to the Divine command, going out of his own country and from his own kindred to a strange land, not knowing whither he went. Seems it a small thing in your eyes to make such a sacrifice of relations, and things present, visible and agreeable, on the command and for the sake

of an unseen God and things invisible? But this is walking before God with a perfect heart, when we confer not with flesh and blood, but on his authority venture on untried and unknown things, receiving not yet the promised good that is to out-balance all present inconveniences, but waiting patiently for it, and trusting the Divine veracity without wavering. No man, without this faith, can stir one step toward heaven: notions, opinions, speculations of Divine truths, may be attained; but one saving, holy, and spiritual perception is not attained, but in the way of this self-denying faith. The smallest cross will overcome, the slightest temptation will subdue a man, without this faith; and with it, it is hard to say, not what is a cross and a temptation—for felt they are, and often severely too—but it is hard to say what cross or temptation can prevail.

Wherever Abraham travels, he calls on the name of Jehovah. He is not ashamed of his God amidst a number of strangers and idolaters: and his travelling, unsettled condition continually reminds him that here he is not at home; an heavenly city is his object, and nothing diverts him from it. In prayer and calling on the name of Jehovah, he keeps up the sense of his relation to God; and while he views him as his Father, he reverences him as a son. See now how a child of God walks before him in society and business, as well as in prayer and devotion. Lot is the younger:

it is natural for Abraham to feel his superiority, and insist on Lot's yielding; but observe how he speaks: "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee....for we be brethren." "If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right: or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." Were all disputes this way determined among Christians—that is, did they strive who should yield first—there would not be that reproach of the Gospel among us that there is. Matters of property or money are so perfectly trifling compared with the Christian's spiritual treasures, and he has so little to do with them consistently with his heavenly plan, that if there be any thing more than another in which believers should shew themselves easy and yielding and indifferent, it is here. But how few are like minded with the excellent Nehemiah, who, rebuking his oppressing brethren, says, "Ought we not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?" The man who is not influenced by this motive,—the fear of bringing shame on the Gospel, and dishonouring God, by being tenacious, selfish, and hard in his dealings,—ought to find it difficult to believe he has any portion in the God of Israel. For it is the business of faith to realize things invisible, in their excellent sweetness, and for their sake to sit loose to the earth; and if it do its office, the effect will be shewn in the practice.

Nor does Abraham's love to Lot cease with this transaction. He frees him from captivity afterward at his own hazard. He is jealous that his partners, in the expedition against Chederlaomer, shall have their portion: he will receive nothing for himself from the King of Sodom.—Why need I recount his unwavering faith, again, in the Divine promise of a son, under such unpromising circumstances; his ready submission to the painful rite of circumcision; his generous and ardent intercession for Sodom; his care of his family, whereby, the Lord himself being witness, he so taught his household, that they kept the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment? His walking before God to sincere perfection appears particularly in that great trial, the parting with his son. Here it was seen how strongly he trusted the word of God indeed, accounting that God was able to raise him from the dead, and fulfil all the Gospel promises. Here it was seen how his will bended to the authority of his God; that there was nothing which he kept back from God; no reserve; no, not in the most tender point of natural affection. Language fails to praise this act of obedience as it deserves; let it carry the praise it merits through eternity in silent admiration, not of Abraham as Abraham, but of the abounding grace of God in Jesus, which can triumph so gloriously, to the honour of God, above all the discouragements of sense, and all the feel-

ings of nature: and let all who follow Abraham's faith, learn to be thus perfect, like him.

3. It remains, lastly, that the subject be more particularly applied to our consciences.

I might apply it in an indirect way to the carnal and ungodly, those who live in open and avowed immorality. "I am the all-bountiful, omnipresent One: walk ye before me, and be ye perfect." But the best use they can make (and I would to God the ungodly in this house made such use of the subject!) is to see how at present they are in a condemned state, totally estranged from God.—"I am the all-bountiful One." These reverence not his bounty, look not up to his goodness, depend not on his liberality: they are gods to themselves. If they have ill success, they curse their fortune or their stars, really murmuring in their hearts against God: if they have good success, it is 'my power, my industry, my good management, that hath done it;' and they harden their hearts in pride; God is not honoured by them for his goodness, and they look on less successful ones with self-complacency and superior contempt.—"I am the omnipresent One." Do you believe it, ye who dare to profane his name continually? Heard he, think you, those oaths and curses? Are they registered in his book? Can you refrain yourselves a little from your horrible practice in the presence of your superiors, to whom it would be offensive, and yet not restrain your-

selves at all in other company? Does not this shew that God is not in all your thoughts; that, far from looking on the Lord as every where present, you do not behold him present any where at all?—"Walk before me." You have not stirred one step in such a walk. Your walk is all contrary to him. To approve yourselves to God, is the last of your thoughts. To suit your own humour, to gratify your own lusts, these things you consult in all your conduct.—"And be thou perfect;" hearty, strong, sincere in serving God. But you must begin to serve him at all, to take him for your Master first. Satan is at present your master. Oh repent! his wages are everlasting torment. God only deserves to be served: his service is holiness, the true freedom of the soul. What a mercy, you may come to God yet, by the atoning blood of Jesus, and be saved! The Lord has spared you, notwithstanding all your provocations: you are on mercy's ground: reject not this warning, which by my mouth, as a minister of Christ, he directs to you. Turn, turn you: why will you die, when the Lord declares he has no pleasure in your death, but would rather you should turn and live? Come to him by Jesus, and from this day seek his face, till he rain righteousness and salvation upon you.

But the more direct use of the text is to believers, or at least to those who profess to

walk with God already. Consider, brethren, God is "all-bountiful:" what a reason is that for your walking before him! Undertake nothing without him; depend on him in every thing; ask his counsel in all things. Use him as a Father; behave to him as his sons. Keep up a sense of the relation. Have no interest separate from your Father's. Do not betray his interests to strangers. Do not allow yourselves in wishing for any thing contrary to his will. Is he not all-bountiful to provide for his children? Is he not the only competent judge of what is good for them?—He is "omnipresent:" then walk before him in secresy, in business, in society: place him always before you: fear no evil but sin; he is ever present to defend you. But what a strong rebuke does the text convey of that walking before men, instead of walking before God, which so much abounds among men. That the evil world, lying in wickedness, should be guilty of this, is not to be wondered at; but that those who know the Lord should yet be so solicitous to please men, so very desirous of the good graces of others, so studious of obtaining the good will of the rich and the opulent; ah! in these things a worldly spirit too strongly appears: we want more communion with God in Christ, that we may learn to walk more simply before him.

Nor is it only with respect to the wicked world, but with respect to one another, that

believers ought to examine themselves. Let us think deeply what spirit we are of. Are we really seeking to please God in all our conduct, or one another? He who means to bring forth fruit unto eternal life, must not seek to please men: he has but one Master to serve, one interest to take care of. He is not to consider how such or such an one will be pleased or displeased; but, Is this right in the sight of God? this is the only ultimate rule. Should we not take care, you say, not to affront or grieve other persons? Yes, surely, not unnecessarily: on the contrary, we ought to labour to please all men, to do good to all, and to live peaceably with all men. But why? not for the sake of worldly gain or praise, but to please God, and to walk acceptably before him, who orders us thus to demean ourselves. Now whether we have his fear before us, or not, in doing so, will appear by our conduct in such cases as these:—A minister who sees a wrong taste prevailing in religion among his people, will be tried whether he walks before God or not, according as he is faithful in rebuking them or not, though to the hazard of his popularity. A Christian is tried whether he walks before God or not, by his faithfulness in rebuking sin in a brother. Ah, brethren, are we not too much like the world, in smoothness of speech, and insincerity of conduct, and want of that plain dealing and freedom from guile which peculiarly become the disciples of the God

of truth? And consider what you know of the perfection described in the former part of this discourse. I gave you my sense of it, and do apprehend all, who live to God indeed, have at heart, in experience, the same idea. He will make a very bad use of what he has heard who shall fall to jangling instead of practising. Labour after sincere love. This is the whole of perfection. Brethren, labour after it. Rest not without it: even the love of God and our neighbour, through Jesus Christ. And grace be with all them who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

SERMON XIX.

PREVALENCY OF PRAYER EXEMPLIFIED IN JACOB.

HOSEA xii. 3—6.

He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept and made supplication unto him: he found him in Beth-el, and there he spake with us; even the Lord God of hosts; The Lord is his memorial. Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually.

JACOB, who on the particular occasion here alluded to was called Israel, the father of the twelve Patriarchs of the Jewish nation, is the person spoken of in this passage. Let us see, first, the general idea of the prophet; whence we may more clearly lay down the practical uses of the story of Jacob.

It pleased God, even before the birth of this eminent saint, to foretel, by a remarkable emblematical circumstance, what success should afterward attend him. Jacob's hand, we are told in the Book of Genesis, took hold of Esau's heel. That he was to become superior

to his brother, was in this type foretold. But if one ask, in what way he excelled him, let it be carefully noted, notwithstanding an instance of very blameable deceitfulness into which in his youth he was led by the fraud of his mother, that on the whole, and in general, his superiority was maintained by the prayer of faith. Grace made him a man of prayer, serious in the fear of God, valuing above all things spiritual and heavenly blessings. This was the "strength" by which he had "power with God." "Yea, he had power over the Angel, and prevailed." The Angel, is he who is called in the last of the Prophets "the Angel of the Covenant*," even the Lord Jesus, who appeared to him, and wrestled with him, when he was in distress from his brother Esau. How could a poor, sinful, distressed man become like a prince and a conqueror with God? It was by his faith, which wrestled with Him, and would not let him go till he blessed him. On that occasion he wept, and made supplication unto Him; and the Lord blessed him, and delivered him: and he found Him again at Bethel, and there the Lord spake comfortably to him, and in him to the church of God to the end of time. And this Angel was no other than the Lord God of hosts; "The Lord" is his name, by which he is to be remembered in all ages;—that same Lord who appeared to the Patriarchs of old; who had compassion on his people in all their

* "Messenger"—Eng. Trans.

affliction; and who at last became man, and lived and died for us; and in heaven still takes care of his church, and will do so for evermore.

But what are we to learn from this case of Jacob's? Let men who call themselves the people of God, and who would gladly be looked on as the Israel of God, turn to him indeed, in sound conversion of heart; and keep mercy and justice in their dealings and conversation, to shew that they are sincere in his service: and, while they steadily endeavour to obey him in all their conduct, let them not value themselves on their own righteousness; let them humbly hope in his grace and mercy for salvation, after all; and continually depend on him, in firm, patient faith founded on his promises. All this is, doubtless, implied in the advice, "Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually."

1. The first observation shall respect the character of Jacob in general, as compared with that of Esau.

I apprehend it is very common to judge amiss of the character of a good man; and that, through various prejudices, which our corrupt nature easily imbibes, we often prefer the worse before the better. Doubtless Esau had more showy qualities, things that look better in the eye of the world. Esau might be a hero, a soldier, a man of enterprise and high spirit. And, then, Jacob, in one instance,

through his mother's direction, was guilty of a very blameable piece of deceit toward his brother; and this, it seems, must never be forgot. We should distinguish between single actions and habits. Jacob was, doubtless, a man of habitual integrity and uprightness, though notoriously fraudulent in the well-known transaction of supplanting his brother. But it is one of the ways in which the enmity of the heart against godliness shews itself, that a single fault of a good man is never to be forgotten, and is generally made to stand as a mark of the whole character. Now, in Jacob there is nothing that looks great, heroic, or shining. He was a man of peace; loved quietness; checked as far as he could all turbulent and warlike motions in his own family; was a domestic person, active indeed, and industrious, but in still and quiet life; and in his business, which, like that of his father and grandfather, was that of a grazier, he was steady and attentive, and God prospered his work. He loved his family; and his affections were evidently all of the mild and tender sort. Nor do I know that he was distinguished by any remarkably great talents; or ever did, or was capable of doing, any thing likely to render his name illustrious among men. Such was the man who, however, in sacred writ is described as the father of the church; from whose prevalence in prayer the church still retains the name of Israel; and

who was honoured of God more than most men in the Old Testament; and had visions and revelations in abundance from the Most High. Wherein, then, lay the excellence of the character? He was a plain, obscure person; but he was one who eminently feared God. Even in the things in which he used wrong means to gain his end, the ends which he aimed at were right. To serve and to enjoy God; to live for the next world, not for this; to walk with God as a friend; to rest on his promises; and to be thankful for mercies received, and yet (as on one occasion he speaks) to look on himself as not worthy of the least of God's mercies—this was Jacob. Devout, humble, fearing God continually; carefully keeping, not himself only, but his household, from idolatry, and teaching them to serve God; rejoicing in the prospect of his salvation by Jesus; and at last, on his dying bed, waiting, as he says, for God's salvation—this is Jacob. I quote no places, nor dwell on particulars, wishing those who have not done it, rather for themselves to study the character, and read attentively his life in the Book of Genesis.

Can you forgive this eminent saint one fraud? His God forgave him it, but chastised him severely for it for many years, by the treacherous conduct of his uncle Laban. In short, by comparing men in this manner together, it may be seen whether men have any real knowledge of true godliness. For Esau,

whatever he may have beside of the soldier or the man of enterprise, was a profane man altogether; valued a morsel of meat above sacred things; was void of prayer and faith in God; a mere worldling; united himself in marriage with idolaters; and, except when he was once in great distress of mind, quite careless of the Divine blessing. Let us take care, and weigh characters in the balance of the sanctuary: Where the fear and love of God are not, men must be wrong. There are generous and respectable characters who hate all godliness, and would sneer at a low character, such as that of godly Jacob. I wish us, however, to consider what will be the end of these things: the regard for God will over-balance at the last day, and vengeance will seize those who hate him.

2. A second remark, which obviously presents itself from the text, is the importance of the spirit of prayer. In no instance, except that of the adorable One who made supplication with strong crying and tears, and was heard in that he feared, does the beauty and glory of prayer appear more apparent than in the case of Jacob. He is told that his brother is coming, with four hundred men, to meet him. What can he do? He himself is defenceless; he has a number of women and children, and flocks and servants, but no soldiers; and he has all reason to fear that the revenge of his brother will be satiated on them all. He was, we are

told, afraid and distressed; and so low was he in all human resources, that he divided his company into two bands, with the melancholy hope, that, if one were smitten, the other might escape——but I said that I would refer you to the Book of Genesis for particulars. He has, however, a resource, large and noble indeed; it is that of prayer. He pours out his soul to God, reminds him of his promise, humbles himself as unworthy of the least of God's mercies, and casts himself wholly on the grace of God. I doubt not but his voice, though mixed with fear and anxiety, was music in heaven. Nothing more honours the Lord, than for his creatures thus in helplessness to wait on him, and shew that indeed they depend on his goodness, at the same time that they confess they deserve nothing good at his hands. Yes; he is a God that heareth prayer: such he has been known to be in all ages: and he sits on the Throne of Grace for that purpose; and has opened our way to it through his Son, whom he has given to be our High Priest, and who is ready to present the prayers of all who come to him in his name. But a single ejaculation suffices not here. The case was difficult, and it required a vehemence and a perseverance in prayer. He sent his family before him, and remained alone. There the Angel of the Covenant wrestled with him, and, by touching the hollow of his thigh, and making it to shrink, shewed how very unable

Jacob was to deal with him, if he had pleased to exert himself. But Jacob persevered in wrestling, weeping, and praying; and declared he would not let him go, except he blessed him. See the graciousness of the answer: "As a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." "And he blessed him there." The Lord softened the fierce heart of Esau to kindness; and Jacob found what a prayer-hearing God he had to deal with. Jacob being answered in the day of his distress, found his God at Bethel; raised an altar to him; and there his blessings were graciously confirmed.

What I would impress on my own mind and yours from hence, is, that earnest prayer in faith and humility to God, is no mean thing. I find nothing like it, indeed, in Esau, or men like Esau. Profane persons know not what it means: they have no faith in God. They may think, to fight with others, or even to murder themselves, a noble thing; but to pray appears weak and mean. It is not so judged in heaven. When a repenting sinner begins indeed to pray, our Lord tells us there is joy in heaven over him at the very same time that men on earth are despising or jeering him: so different, brethren, is the spirit of heaven from the spirit of the world. Would you know whether you are converted to God or not? a surer sign can scarce be than this,—a child of God prays without ceasing. Prayer is the voice of the new creature: he cannot live

without it: but spiritual blessings are its chief object. Now with the unconverted it is otherwise. If they pray, it is only in form, and outwardly. Besides your attendance on public worship, when do you pray in private? What vehement cries and groans of soul did you ever utter? When did your heart break out for the fervent desire that it had to God's judgments? Here is the essential difference between Jacob and Esau.—I beseech you, brethren, weigh this, and apply. Be assured, praying people, you will find the benefit of your prayers; and the less you find it here, the more you will find it hereafter. But ye who despise praying, and cannot endure it, know, that if your proud spirit is not bent to it here, you will have to wail in torment hereafter. It is fitting that God should have his glory from his creatures some way or other. Better give it him now, in humble prayer.—And in the history of all good men there are generally some remarkable seasons, in which, when brought very low, they found the benefit of prayer. This in Jacob we have seen; and it is not singular: I trust there are persons here who can say, 'At such a time, in sickness—in agony of conscience—in great family affliction—under sore temptation, when I seemed overpowered—I prayed and was heard.' It is worth while for all praying people to treasure up these things: they are of use to strengthen faith, and patience, and hope, and gratitude.

God this way shews what he is; and every such instance demonstrates the benefit of the Throne of Grace and of such an Advocate as Jesus. Oh, if there were more praying, God would thus be better known in the world than he is, and earth would be more like to heaven. Oh, if men under trouble learnt, with Jacob, to wrestle in prayer, instead of repining, murmuring, and disputing, and using forbidden ways to help themselves, afflictions would then indeed appear to be blessings in disguise, and would richly pay for all the pain they bring on us, by their wholesome fruit, and the experience they would afford us of the grace and power of that God who is nigh to them who call upon him in truth.

3. For it must be observed, and the whole story of Jacob shews it, that the dearest children of God are subject to affliction. The privileges of a child of God are not to be estimated by outward things. Of these two brothers, Jacob and Esau, the former has all along the testimony of the Divine favour; the latter, of his displeasure; as it is written, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Yet in outward things the contrary appeared. Except in the few last years of his pilgrimage, Jacob's whole life was a series of trials, as is well known; but Esau was successful and prosperous in the world, and, as far as appears, suffered little in comparison of his brother. Let every one who seeks the Divine favour learn

hence what he has to expect, and place his hopes and affections on things above. For,

4. Here let the Israel of God learn to repose: all shall end well. Jacob could say at last of his God, that he was "the God who had fed him all his life long....the Angel which redeemed him from all evil." And in his last dying words to his children, he cried, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord:" and his end was peace. Christians must expect a variety of crosses, often grievous crosses. To look above and beyond them all, to the land of rest and peace, would be their wisdom; and thus to possess their souls in patience, till their change come.

5. Lastly, then, let the concluding advice of the text be written on our hearts: "Therefore turn thou to thy God; keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually."—Brethren, we find ourselves in a world of evil and vanity. What shall we do? Seek for happiness from the world? Bitter disappointment will be sure to attend us. Give ourselves up to murmuring and dejection of spirit? This is to dishonour God, and disqualify ourselves from enjoying him either in this life or the next. What then? First, "turn to God:" Come near and close to him: for in Christ he offers himself to become our God, our portion for ever. Confess your misery and sinfulness; be humbled before God; believe his promises in Christ; venture on them for your own sal-

vation; and put yourselves into his hands, to be wholly converted and made his for ever. Then, secondly, "keep mercy and judgment." Let no afflictions or ill treatment induce you to forsake the path of uprightness. Be just, be merciful. In the strength of his Spirit walk thus steadily with God all your days;—and, thirdly, as still you will find matter enough to try your patience through life, never cast off hope; trust Him "continually," till you see what he can and will do for you. Your best things will be to come hereafter.

SERMON XX.

PERSEVERANCE IN PRAYER TAUGHT BY THE EXAMPLE OF MOSES.

EXODUS xvii. 11.

And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.

THE state of affairs among the children of Israel, during the crisis of the text, was as follows:—The chosen people had been in the iron furnace of oppression in Egypt, and their cry had come up to God by reason of the bondage; and God, remembering his covenant with them, had at length brought them out of Egypt by a mighty hand, with terrible demonstrations of his power, and overwhelmed their enemies in the Red Sea. The people, under the conduct of Moses, were travelling, through a waste and terrible wilderness, to the land which he had sworn to give them; and in their march, we are told (Deut. xxv. latter end), they were met by Amalek, who "smote the hindmost of them, even all that were feeble behind them, when they were faint and weary: and he feared not God." In this distress, Joshua,

by Moses's orders, fought with Amalek, while Moses stood on the top of the hill with the rod of God in his hand. Then follows the wonder of the text; "When Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed." I need not say, that lifting up the hands to heaven is in Scripture the constant attitude of earnest prayer, and that Moses prayed in this posture. But, as his hands were heavy, by a contrivance of Aaron and Hur, who stayed them up, his hands were kept steady till the going down of the sun. The event was according to their expectation: by that time Joshua discomfited Amalek with the edge of the sword.

Let us endeavour to set forth the spiritual life of this whole affair; for the Gospel is taught by types and shadows throughout the Old Testament, as the Epistle to the Hebrews abundantly proves. The people of God are at first in a state of darkness and bondage, worse than Egyptian,—the sin and misery of fallen nature, and the tyranny of the devil. The Lord delivers them from the powers of darkness, and translates them into the kingdom of his dear Son, in whom they have redemption, through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. But after this, if it please him to continue them some time on earth, they have to travel through the wilderness of this world, in their way to the heavenly Canaan—to which their title is now, by faith, as good as it ever can be;—and

now that is fulfilled which our Lord says; "Because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." The devil also labours to bruise and buffet them. And, what is worst of all, they have a treacherous heart; the old man, with all its members, warring against the law of their mind. Their enemies attack them, as Amalek did Israel in the wilderness: they have no mercy on them in their distress: they take advantage of their feebleness and weariness. And what are their resources? "O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." They look up to God, stretching forth their hands unto him. Nor is it every view of God that will suffice: God in Christ is their covenant God, to whom they have fled for refuge; who is willing to shew them the immutability of his counsel. They behold (for so they are enabled by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation) Christ the hope of their calling, who is raised from the dead, and is set at the Father's right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in that which is to come; who hath all things put under his feet; and is given to be the Head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. What a view is this of God in Christ, which the Apostle, in the first chapter of Ephesians, gives us! You see a poor

distressed worm here on earth assaulted by all the powers of hell and the world, and carrying within him an inbred enemy, a sinful nature: you see him looking up to a Man in heaven, united to the Godhead in one person, who is as closely connected to him as the head is with the members of the body; with every look he draws down strength, food, joy, and life, out of his fulness. You see the malice of enemies, all the hosts of hell labouring to afflict and distress him: you see the watchful eye of this wonderful, mighty God, beholding their attempts; permitting them to go so far, and no farther; over-ruling all their assaults for his own glory and the good of the poor worm; and baffling them with ease when he pleases; as all the hosts of hell are under his feet, however mighty they be. In all this warfare, as the man lifts up his hands to his Saviour with the prayer of faith, he finds in that proportion strength and victory: when he neglects prayer, then his enemies, like Amalek of old, prevail. As there is an appointed time for man upon earth, this warfare must continue more or less till the poor pilgrim arrive at the land "where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest."

There are many means of grace to be used besides prayer: but the prayer of faith, whereby the soul looks up to Jesus in every hour of need, and cries and expects relief from him, this, I say, is the grand mean. If you neglect

it, you may take what pains in religion you will besides; you may consult books and men, and scheme and resolve for ever; and you might just as well do nothing. The devil knows his own strength too well to quit the field before any but Christ. Guilt and corruption are only to be vanquished by faith in Christ. See, then, the nature and importance of our subject, —the wrestlings of a Christian.

Let us, with God's help, for the comfort and instruction of Christians, or of those who desire to be Christians, proceed to describe some particulars of this matter, and shew how true in general that is, which was found to be so in Amalek's affair.

Whenever God's Israel, after the example of wrestling Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, "Israel shall be thy name," whenever, I say, his people pray earnestly, they get spiritual light, comfort, strength, and victory: when they are trifling and negligent in this, they grow barren and weak, and their spiritual enemies are mighty. Ardent, persevering prayer, therefore, is needful in order for effectual victory. As when Moses's hands were held up steady to the going down of the sun, with the rod of God in his hand, Amalek was effectually discomfited; in like manner, the Christian, instant in prayer, with the word of God's promises in Christ in his mouth and heart, will prevail also. The rod of God was that with which Moses was enabled

to do all the signs and wonders in Egypt. He might say, and no doubt in his heart did say, I have seen God's enemies flee before this in his strength; and I trust I shall see the same again. So, likewise, may the Christian say, With this sword of the Spirit, the word of God, I have been enabled to conquer my spiritual foes, and shall do so again. When first the Lord began with sharp convictions to strive with you, when dead in trespasses and sins, how was it with you? Your soul was bowed down. When you strove to bring yourself to peace, by persuading yourself that your sins were not very great, or by some little degree of outward reformation, or by following vain amusements, what did you get by it? You know you got no solid peace by this. Trifle you might indeed, and stupify your soul, for a time; but no rest, no satisfaction, no happiness: neither did you in the least grow in that, which, in your own account of things, was then the true growth of man,—you did not grow in goodness of moral conduct, or in bridling your appetites and passions. Of what avail were all the fine reasonings by which you endeavoured to argue yourself out of love with godliness? While you really were influenced by false shame, pride, and the love of the world, you took mighty pains to persuade yourself that you were influenced by prudence and good sense, and you affected to pity poor deluded enthusiasts. Now, all this time your

hands were let down; no praying: except formal saying of prayers, without a heart; this is not praying at all. And did not Amalek prevail? Those whom you despised as weak, silly religionists, you could see plainly delighting in religion: the little religion you had was a burden to you. They evidently were getting the better of their passions, lusts, and tempers: you were more and more enslaved by yours. This should have taught you, that they were in possession of a secret hidden from you—according to what is written, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant;"—that they were possessed of the true wisdom, the true victory over sin; while you, with all your supposed superior sense, prudence, and caution, were overcome by your passions and lusts. Our Lord says, "By their fruits ye shall know them:" you should have known who were right and who were wrong by these things: but at that time you did not.

Now view a moment the opposite side; though in the first scenes even of true religion, little is to be said on the comfortable side of the subject: for it is the nature of godliness to reserve her greatest triumphs to more distant periods, her greatest of all to a life after this. But even now, when at times your convictions were powerful enough to drive you to earnest prayer, though your cry was like that of ravens to a God they know not, yet

was not the effect comfortable? Did you not find, by some softness of heart, some kind though distant glimpses, by some clearness of judgment as the effect—did you not find, I say, that Amalek's force was blunted in some little degree? Did not God, as it were, win you to come nearer and nearer to him? Did he not, as it were, suggest to you, This is the way of victory, rest, and happiness: use this way, and thou shalt prevail. And then sin was in some measure less powerful, temptations were less violent; you found some delight in God's ordinances; and a hope rose in your breast that you might one day be as happy as those who you saw rejoiced in the Lord. But you did not follow on to know the Lord; else his going forth was prepared as the morning, and he would have come unto you as the rain. You trifled; you neglected prayer; grew cold, formal, and short in it; and at length almost left it off altogether. Then, it may be, temptations to leave Christ and his truth prevailed over you. You profaned the Sabbath; you grew ashamed of God's people; other lords beside the God of the Scriptures had dominion over you: riches, pleasures, or worldly honours, were now with you the grand object. And in proportion as you neglected prayer, did not you grow less and less strict in your moral conduct? It may be you grew a strong advocate for morality—sad hypocrisy! but hypocrisy unknown to yourself;—

your own morals were less and less strict; and your experience bears witness that the true road to a good, moral, and really religious life, is by Jesus alone, the Way; and, by the prayer of faith in him, deriving strength and life continually from him. Thus did you destroy yourself; but in God was your help: He spared your life, and sent you not to destruction, as justly he might have done long since. Conviction of guilt and danger, with alarming fears and a constant restlessness, these were the messengers of God most high to bring you again to himself. The love of the Lord was beyond thought prodigious to you. The former drawings of the Divine Spirit, it may be, were superficial, compared with what the Lord had now to do with you. He never suffered you to rest, till he brought you to the true rest in believing in Jesus your King and sole Saviour. What did you gain by endeavouring to reason yourself out of your difficulties? You increased them exceedingly. What did you lose by praying earnestly and pleading with Jesus? O my soul (you can say), thou hast lost many a care and burden: many an ugly temptation and hinderance has vanished into nothing, while thou prayedst. When you were in darkness, and did not know which way to go, did you not find relief by praying, Lord, shew the way to a blind man. Was not redemption by Christ, and complete justification before God, shewn thee, O believer,

by his Spirit shining on the word? And however thou hast been assaulted since, yet is not this (it may be after some years), is not this still thy foundation; art not thou abiding on it still? What a proof hast thou of the text! How has Amalek fallen before the power of prayer! How mighty thy Jesus; how gracious hast thou found him! And when the enemy came in like a flood, with blasphemous suggestions, soul-hardening reasonings against the Lord; when he made use of thy proud legal bias to torment thee; when this prince of the air darkened the glory of Christ; when he spread a gloom over Providence, the Scriptures, thy evidences, and every thing—speak honestly, and let others know, ye who have had trial of these things, how you found deliverance. When you trifled, loitered, and did not eye the Lord, you had no rest in your spirit; but when you came in good earnest to the Throne of Grace, with God's promises in hand, and your eye on Jesus interceding for you, and saying, "Ask, and ye shall receive," did not, it may be, all hell feel, as it were, the power of Jesus muzzling her roaring lions? did not sweet light come from above; and did not the Lord fetch you out of many waters? How was it with you when you first experienced this, in adoption, peace, and the sense of God's forgiving love? Men ignorant of Christianity say no such thing is to be known in this life. If one refer them to

the experience of godly men, they call it enthusiasm; and some really godly men, I fear, are too much influenced with excessive worldly caution on this most interesting subject. This I will say, that those who have felt what guilt is indeed, and do still feel it, in the nature of things will not rest till it be taken away. Faith in Christ's blood does this—faith, and faith alone. He that has had his conscience brought to peace any other way, has had it done in a way in which he is not to be envied. Mark that man, ye that know him: he is worse than before in his life; his soul is hardened. May God find him out, and lead him right, lest the devil's peace lead him at length to the devil's torment! But where God gives true peace, there *is*, there *is* the sense of his forgiveness. I have often shewn, from God's word, that this is attainable, and should be sought after by every one. I will give you David's experience upon it in the Thirty-second Psalm. It affords a remarkably instructive instance of the effect of earnest prayer, and of neglect in prayer, according to our subject. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." Thus, when he let down his hands, Amalek prevailed. But when he could say, "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid; I said, I will confess my transgressions

unto the Lord;" then he could add also, "Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." When he held up his hands, Israel prevailed. Ye that want the same peace, use the same method: ye shall have the same success, as I trust not a few before me can bear witness.

The field is too large to be entered upon very minutely in its particular branches. Let us just mention a few more instances of the success of wrestling prayer, and of the contrary.—You found, after you believed through grace, you had a heavy cross of some sort or other continually to carry. You grew impatient, and, neglecting prayer, gave yourself up too much to a froward and complaining humour. But how was it with you when you cried indeed to the Lord for a submissive, resigned spirit? Have you not found it was with you as with the troubled sea when the Saviour spake the word "Peace, be still?" Thus, when you lifted up your hands, Israel prevailed. That sweet, humble calm of soul took place in you, which made your breast the very heaven in which Jesus delights to dwell, and the Most High was exalted in your soul. What pain have your sensual and worldly inclinations given you! what a difficulty even to desire Divine blessings! while the heart has been going astray after various vanities, and loving the things of the world with inordinate affection. You wrestled with the Lord, for that view of him, and that inward strength, which should discomfit

these Amaleks. Has not the Lord heard you; and after, it may be, a long hiding of his face, the God of Israel returns to you, sweeter and more delightful than ever, and grants you that free communion with himself which makes you say, with Ephraim, "What have I to do any more with idols?" And with regard to particular distresses and temptations, whether inward or outward, and from whatever quarter they proceed; or with regard to a discouraging sense of weakness and unfitness for duty and suffering, while you let down your hands, Amalek prevails; but when you wrestle at the Throne of Grace, does not Israel prevail, in a way far above what you could have conceived? for the Lord makes darkness light, and crooked things straight, before his people, above what they can ask or think. What encouragement hence for you to trust him, and live upon his grace, and wrestle with him for the performance of his promises in every time of need for the time to come, since you can say with thankfulness, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped me!"—You may be under discouraging thoughts of death at times. O wrestle with Christ, ye that know him, that you may have his hand with you at that trying hour; that you may prevail over Amalek to the end, and enjoy at length an eternal rest in the victorious arms of your Saviour, having been enabled, with good Jacob, to call him the

Angel that redeemed your soul from all evil, the God that fed you all your life long.

The use of this subject to the believer has appeared in the course of it: it loudly speaks, In all thy trials, burdens, and cares, wrestle with the God of Israel in prayer, and thou shalt prevail; and beware of neglecting this his appointed means, lest evil prevail over thee. And may not this subject be improved also for the benefit of families, as well as single souls, that they should unite in fervent, wrestling prayer for family blessings? Oh, where family prayer is kept up in vigour and life, how is the God of Israel engaged to protect and bless such houses! how will he bless them in family concerns, and own himself a God hearing prayer! On this account let me once more recommend to you the worship of God in your houses; alas! a too-long neglected duty. Forbid it, O our God, that any who know thee should through false shame live in the neglect of it. Let our intercessions be extended for our own country in general, and for the church of God in particular. Oh for wrestling spirits, that we might wrestle with our God in prayer for our Israel, that in the midst of judgments he would remember mercy!

I cannot conclude without a word to those who are strangers to hearty prayer. May God find them out, and apply the word to them with power! However you may deride

praying people, yet you must acknowledge they are far happier than you. In trouble, they can pour out their hearts to an unseen Friend, who will hear them in this life, and save them eternally in the next. But you have no such Friend: you are strangers to this wrestling spirit, and all its consequences. Wretched men! if you will not pray here, it will be too late to pray in hell. Cry to God in Christ for mercy; you are on the brink of destruction! To live without prayer, is to live without God. But, oh begin to pray, lest God cast you away in his wrath! You will find he will hear, if you once begin to pray heartily; and Christ will present your prayers to his Father.

SERMON XXI.

THE STORY OF GIDEON.

JUDGES vi. 11.

And there came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abi-ezrite: and his son, Gideon, threshed wheat by the wine-press, to hide it from the Midianites.

THERE never was a book in the world so beautifully simple and uniform as the Bible: it consistently points out one thing, carries on one steady purpose, and centres in one object, from one end to the other. To glorify God, its author; to discover his true character to the sons of men; to testify the way in which only we can know, worship, honour, and enjoy him aright, is its grand design. Having briefly acquainted us with the creation and the fall of man, it ushers in the way of salvation by Jesus; and in type and in prophecy, in history and in doctrine, this is explained more and more to the end: nor does it cease till it has shewn us how the mystery of God will be finished, and his kingdom be completed for ever.

But much of the beauty of this blessed book is hid from us, much also of its usefulness is lost to us, because of our carelessness and irreverence in consulting it; a large part of the Old Testament (much of the history particularly) being sadly neglected, even by God's own people. We seem still to want more reverent and more penetrating views of the design of all the Old Testament. It is not to entertain us merely with facts, like common history, though it does serve this end also: it is not merely to point out to us praiseworthy or blameable examples, though this use may, and ought to be, made of it: but the grand design is much deeper: "The testimony of Jesus" (St. John, in the Revelations, is told from Heaven) "is the spirit of prophecy;" and, as the Epistle to the Hebrews at large and abundance of passages inform us, and indeed the whole system of Scripture teaches, God in Christ is the grand object of every part of it. 'The whole Old Testament,' as St. Austin says, 'is nothing else but a continued prophecy of the New. The carnal and temporal things of the Jewish church are shadows of spiritual and eternal things; and when we read them with spiritual eyes, in all the sacrifices, and the temple with all its appendages, we see Christ, the High Priest and the True Sacrifice. In the land of Canaan we see heaven itself: in Israel of old we see the

church of God: in their enemies—Egyptians, Midianites, or whatever else—we see the world and the devil fighting against the church of God: in the wilderness pilgrimage of Israel we see the people of God travelling through the wilderness of this bad world to the land of rest. In all things, Jesus and his kingdom are held forth; and by the advantage of these carnal objects, we have spiritual things more sensibly brought to our view; and when the New Testament is our guide, when we are well established in Christian truth, and are looking to the Spirit for direction, possessed also of the true law and plan of all Scripture, and ever bearing it in mind, we may freely make use of Old-Testament history for the purposes of spiritual edification. I know the danger of fanciful allegories and whimsical interpretations; but the best things may be abused. This is no argument against the sober use of the Old-Testament typical history; and the judgment of profane men, little versed in Scripture, is not here to be regarded. With these views, let us proceed to make some due improvement of the history of Gideon. The words of my text introduce the man to our acquaintance; and, while I endeavour to collect matter from hence for our spiritual good, will you lift up your hearts in prayer to the Father of lights, that the vail may be taken from our hearts; that, being turned to the

Lord, and made free by his Spirit, we may in Gideon's history behold his glory, and be satisfied with his goodness!

The beginning of the chapter shews us Israel in deep distress: They have forsaken the Lord, and he has delivered them into the hand of Midian. Do not suppose it is merely gross wickedness, such as every one will own to be wickedness, which the Lord is displeased with in them. This is a common mistake. No doubt there was this among them also, as indeed there is among us, in abundance, luxury, deceit, intemperance, gaming, extravagance, drunkenness. But the root of the evil is much deeper: these are the surface of things: if we stop here, we never shall be cured of the disorder of sin. The sin of the heart, the master sin, was then, and is now, idolatry. They worshipped Baal, as appears farther on in this chapter; they set up another god against the living and true God. It must strike every observer, that Israel of old is far more reproved for this than all other sins. And is not the same thing practised now, but with different circumstances? Ah! how well were it if we saw the idolatry of our hearts! Brethren, desire to understand it; pray for light herein. That is an idol, whatever it be, which we put our trust in, and place our happiness in, instead of God, either for temporal or spiritual things: and God, who is jealous of his glory, is here peculiarly affronted. As a nation, have

we not commonly, in time of war, been guilty of this very thing? Have our great men, our captains by land or sea, our statesmen, our senators—I may ask, has the people of this land in general—looked to the Holy One of Israel as the God of battles? Have we not plainly trusted in such emergencies to an arm of flesh? The worst of it is, this sin of idolatry is most provokingly committed when men think nothing of it. We do not, indeed, worship Baal; but we worship ourselves, our valour, our management, and the like. And which is the worst species of idolatry? If the first shew more superstition, the latter shews more pride. But look at spiritual things. Have not the principles of Gospel salvation by Jesus, in which God is truly glorified, been despised and run down to nothing among us? Oh how many hearts, I fear, are, in this very congregation, not yet estranged from their idols! not humbly confessing their vileness and desert of hell; not brought to give God his glory, by trusting only in his Son Jesus, but by a decent life and their sacramental forms hoping to save their souls!—for this idolatry is deep rooted in us all by nature; it is the effect of our fall from God; and he who never felt it in himself, mourned sore for it, and fought against it, is its accursed slave to this hour. Now, what the Lord did to Israel of old, in delivering them to the will of their enemies, as a punishment for idolatry, he does

now, and is always doing, in the world. Did the hand of Midian prevail against Israel? was Israel greatly impoverished? Let our national and private distresses, experienced from time to time, point out the hand of God as chastising our proud forgetfulness of him. Let even saints, who are buffeted by Satan and scourged by variety of inward trials, because of proud self-righteousness, acknowledge that the Lord is humbling their pride. And, oh! it were well if both saints and the nation at large learnt to do, as I find in the chapter before me Israel did,—they "cried unto the Lord" because of the Midianites. Faint, lazy prayers do not sufficiently shew men sensible of their sin and their danger. Men in distress will *cry* to the Lord. It is in affliction that men feel their need of God; in prosperity they forget him. But we love ease and quiet, and are impatient for deliverance. God means not only to deliver his people for their ease, but also in a way that shall manifest his own glory; for we are prone to forget him, and are apt to ascribe our good things to any thing rather than to him. It is meet that men, that nations, should know, what they are extremely dull to learn, what a bitter thing it is to depart from God; what an accursed thing idolatry is. Hence, before men who seek salvation by Jesus are comforted with his mercy, they are generally made to feel some time the misery to which their sin has brought them;

and if they have been much lifted up in idolatrous pride, and have much wisdom, much self-confidence, much righteousness of their own, they often need long and severe work of this nature; for by experience only are men made to learn their nothingness.

A prophet is sent to the children of Israel, who reminds them of past mercies and deliverances, and of their grand, simple point of duty: "I am the Lord your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites:.....but ye have not obeyed my voice." So the Lord speaks to our land. Temporal, national, spiritual mercies we have had in rich abundance; but we have not obeyed his voice; and the man who is taught of God will learn his own lesson here too strongly for me to need to repeat it. But how good is the Lord! He would convince us how vile we are, not to upbraid and insult, but to dispose us for receiving his mercy. There is no being happy in a proud state of mind. When we preach the Gospel, and tell you how evil you are, and in what need you stand of converting and renewing grace in Jesus; if you be easy and careless, and content yourselves with a cold, general assent, and will not see your filthiness, but will hope and expect mercy, and think you are not so very bad, though you are not so good as you should be; this proud, unfeeling state of mind leaves you unfit for Jesus: "he scorneth the scorners, but he giveth grace to the lowly."

See, then, the goodness of God in the following history of Gideon: his goodness to Gideon, the instrument; and in him, to the people. And oh that the tender, gracious character of God our Saviour may be richly displayed to us in the following scenes, till we feel, till we taste, his goodness, and are made happy under its influence! For let it be remembered, that the true character of the Lord God is here set forth for our instruction; as to the proud the terrors of justice, so to the humble the riches of grace; and in Christ only these things meet, and are understood.

"There came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abi-ezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the wine-press, to hide it from the Midianites." In these low circumstances, in this humble labour, we first find that mighty warrior who shines so gloriously through three chapters. "And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." Gideon was, it seems, endowed with great fortitude of soul; had the very spirit of a hero. But this lion-like man, who, left to mere nature, might have ranked among the Alexanders and the Cæsars, and other such savage butchers of mankind, had withal the spirit of a lamb. He who feared not the face of man, was awed with the fear of God. Grace ruled in him, and this was indeed his

true glory. Hence his spirit is all submission to the blessed God, gentle and tractable as a child, and truly humble, as is that of every child of God. His warlike talents we have little or nothing to do with: it is the saint, not the hero, we are called on to observe. "Oh, my Lord," says he, "if the Lord be with us, why is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." And it is in this way, I conceive, that every saint, when he is sore pressed with temptation and corruption, and the hidings of the Lord's countenance, feels himself apt to reason. 'If the Lord loved me indeed, should I go on thus from day to day, bowed down with the spirit of bondage and heaviness? I have read and heard of his loving-kindness and wonderful works; nay, I think, or fancy at least, in former times I have myself felt his grace and compassion, his mighty power, and his stretched-out arm. But, alas! I feel not now his presence; all is dark and discouraging within me: the thick night of unbelief so clouds me, that I see nothing of that glorious Saviour whose love passeth knowledge, whose righteousness alone justifies sinners, and who was manifested to destroy the works of the devil. O Saviour! if thou lovedst me indeed, wouldst thou leave me exposed thus to Satan the roar-

ing lion? Is this he who triumphed over Satan by his cross, who delights to save lost sinners, and is a strong-hold in the day of trouble; who gives songs in the night; who is even an husband to his people, and feasts them with righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost? Will he be as a Baal, to whom his priests cry from morning till noon, and he answers not?'—Let not that man's heart fail within him who is in this state. The most upright walker with God among us may be in it for a time. In this way the Lord uses to beat down the pride of self-confidence, to exercise our dependence and our patience, to scourge us for our sins in mercy, and to prepare us for future displays of his loving-kindness; making us sensible of that grand truth, that salvation is of the Lord; which, in Gospel times, is easily learnt in words, though to learn it from the heart be the greatest lesson in the world. Never was Gideon nearer the most glorious displays of Divine goodness than now, when he seemed the most remote from them. This circumstance should check the spirit of unbelief and despondency, and teach the Lord's people to believe in hope even against hope. And, indeed, to trust our Divine Saviour when every thing seems quite contrary to us, this is Abraham's faith; this is pure faith; this glorifies God; this we should seriously learn: and if I shew it not to be remark-

ably the case in the story of Gideon, I shall miss much of my aim in this whole subject.

"And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have not I sent thee?" This angel evidently carries now the very symbols of the Divine glory; and it seems most probable, from the economy of the Trinity, that the blessed Jesus is he who particularly speaks.—"The Lord looked upon him!" What a look was that! a look of tender regard, of more than motherly affection, pity inexpressible, and the sincerest love. Such a look we may conceive Jesus gave to Peter, after he denied him. And he has still ways of looking on his people: he will love them, he says, and will manifest himself to them.—Now, brethren, try what sort of religion you are of. Are there in this house those who understand such spiritual views of Jesus to be their true bliss; who believe they are promised in Scripture; and in the dryness and barrenness of their souls are longing, are even panting, after such manifestations of Christ to their hearts, saying, 'Oh when wilt thou come to me, O thou infinitely lovely One, crucified for me! when shall I see thy glory and thy beauty! when shall I call thee mine with unfaltering tongue! when shall I hear thee speak, and taste thy love? O come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!' Happy ye! ye hunger

and thirst after righteousness, and in his time and way shall be filled: in patience possess your souls.

But try yourselves, brethren. Are there not many who are saying, I do not know what the man means: surely this is all enthusiasm? And will a hard word, think you, be a sufficient shelter to your souls in the day of wrath and vengeance? What is meant in Scripture, think you, by the "love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost?" What, for it were endless to quote Scripture, in those remarkable words of Jesus, Revel. iii.—(do take notice of this)—"If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me?" Was Jesus enthusiastic, think you, when he spake thus? Is it irrational that the Saviour of men should, by his Spirit, have ways of enlightening, comforting, and filling the souls of those who wait for him? Was the Holy Ghost as a Comforter promised to the Christian church, and is it enthusiastic to feel his comforts? If, indeed, any talk of any comforts which are not scriptural, and in their nature will not bear examining by the scriptural account of things, I reprobate their comforts as severely as any: but that the solid communion with Christ in our souls here on earth, which is the very joy of the Gospel and the earnest of heaven, must be despised, without farther notice, because a proud, ignorant world knows nothing of it, is

this reasonable, is this a Christian part? Let me appeal to your feelings. Oh, fellow-Christians, if all your days you have set light by these things, it is a sign that to this hour you are dead in sins. Repent; and may God give you a better mind. And, I fear, too many, who know better things, are too much run away with by the taste of the world in this respect. Ask how long is it since you had a spiritual visit from Christ; since you enjoyed any discoveries of his love? What strivings, what prayers, have you concerning it? Examine; be honest to yourselves; and if you have gone on a long time in a cold, uniform way, without being able to give any account of these things, be afraid, for you have reason, that you are in a dangerous state. It was surely a time of love when the Lord looked thus kindly on Gideon. He might have severely shewn him how ungratefully both he and his countrymen had behaved, and therefore deserved no favour. But, O gracious God, when thou visitest a sorrowful soul, already bowed down with a sense of sin, thou breakest not the bruised reed. Nothing but love and peace come from thy lips. Thou knowest how slow we are to believe thy loving voice, and therefore thou takest pains to assure us of thy kindness.——This I remark in the Lord's whole treatment of Gideon: A modest, bashful soul, timorous before God, and hardly daring to be confident of his favour, however

firm and resolute before men and strong in natural hardiness of spirit; this lowly modesty, this childish gentleness before God, is the constant mark and character of a real saint. The Lord looks on him with love, and sends him on the honourable commission, and enforces the charge thus, "Have not I sent thee?"

Gideon is modestly shy of the commission: "Oh, my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." There never was a man in the world fitted by God with rare endowments for his holy service, but it was always thus with him: he was ready to think any fitter than himself. The most self-confident are of all others the least qualified. The answer is, "Surely I will be with thee; and thou shalt smite the Midianites." Wonder, brethren, at the Lord's kind condescension in answering all his difficulties. Those who know the Lord's ways can give like proofs. No master so gentle, so considerate, so sympathizing, in the world; for He is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

Gideon can now pause no longer, without evident unbelief. If the Lord be with him, that is enough for faith. And when we seek peace and salvation to our souls, and victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil, or are engaged in any arduous service for God, this is the issue we should desire to have it brought to,—not, "I have counsel and strength for the

war," but, Be things as they may with me, however discouraging, surely the Lord will be with me. This is blessed Paul's resting place: "My grace is sufficient for thee."

Gideon now begs a sign, to strengthen his faith; and the Lord's goodness affords it, by a miraculous fire, as you may read in the following verses; and in his kindness and patience waits till Gideon returns to him. "Shew me a token for good," as in one of the mournful Psalms. Oh, if we prayed more for them, the good Lord would give us more tokens of his love.

But how apt are we to mistake the Lord's goodness, and to be frightened even with the very answer to our prayers! The humble soul of Gideon, being thus assured that it was an angel, says, "Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face." "And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee: fear not: thou shalt not die;"—whether by a vision, or peculiar impression on his spirit, we are not told: it matters not. There is nothing in this new or uncommon as to the substance of the thing: the God of Peace, through Jesus, speaks peace to afflicted consciences to this day. And Gideon, in the joy and gratitude of his heart, "built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom," which means Jehovah the Peace. Precious name! the Lord the peace of his people! and this he eminently is, by the offering of his own body and blood for them.

But mark what follows, O ye saints, whoever you are, who now rejoice in the Lord. He calls you to serve him against the wicked world. The same night the Lord bids him throw down the altar of Baal that his father had, and cut down the idolatrous grove, and build an altar to the Lord his God, and offer a burnt sacrifice. This is the Lord's way: to give comfort, peace, and forgiveness first, of mere grace, to poor sinners; and then, in joy, and in the strength of Divine peace and gratitude, he calls them to serve him in ways which expose them to the hatred of the wicked. And if any of you know experimentally the sweetness of Divine love, so amiably described in the Lord's dealings with Gideon, it will, it must inflame you with hatred against idols. Neither father nor mother, nor any person or thing, will hinder you from serving God. Idolatry you will pull down in your own practice, and will fight against it in others with spiritual weapons. See the madness of the people: they are for killing Gideon, so devoted are they to their accursed idols! And thus, when a man has sweet communion with God, he is exposed to the hatred of the world. Though Gideon does the work by night, it is accepted of his God, whose grace appears so abundant in all his dealings.

The remainder of Gideon's story must be attended to at a future opportunity.

SERMON XXII.

THE STORY OF GIDEON CONTINUED.

JUDGES vi. 34.

But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, and Abi-ezer was gathered after him.

WE have seen Gideon, in the last discourse, by degrees trained and fitted for the great work for which the Lord designed him. He was comforted with unequivocal promises and encouraging views of the Divine mercy: then employed, under the generous and grateful influence of those consolations, in a lesser work, upon a smaller scale,—to throw down the altar of Baal and his grove; which fearing to do by day, he did by night. This work was, notwithstanding, graciously accepted of his God, as are all the works of his people done in true faith and love, whatever unallowed imperfections attend them—though, let it be marked, not one of the actions of the unconverted is accepted with him.

In all this I see a lovely image of the Lord's dealings with his real people in all ages; for he is the same gracious Lord, and his doings

are of a piece, and by the manner and purport of them may be known to be his, in all ages. He first comforts his sorrowful ones, with views of his love in Christ and the forgiveness of sins; then, in this joy, he sends them out to work in his service,—that is, to work *from* life received, not to work *for* life, in order to purchase it. So the Apostle prays for the Thessalonians: "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work." (2 Thess. ii. 16, 17.) God would be served by us with a rejoicing spirit: he would have us know our misery indeed, and sinfulness, and be humbled under the sense of it all our days; but he would have us take up our pardon with the joy of faith; and then, receiving the Holy Ghost through faith, proceed to do his work, and go on performing it, and by experience and growth in grace be fitted more and more to glorify him.

A great mistake is commonly made here. Nature's religion teaches a man first to conquer his sins, and then to rejoice in God; so building his faith in God upon his good works. Not so the Gospel, whether set forth in all its clearness in the New, or wrapped up in types and histories in the Old Testament. None are so fitted to serve God, as those who first trust in his mercy and rejoice in his salvation. And

this is to build good works upon faith, the true order of things, the true principle of serving God. Not, I will do what is good, and for doing it God will accept me; but, I will trust in his mercy in Christ for my full acceptance, vile as I am; and the love of Christ shall constrain me to serve my God in all holiness of living. And there never was any true holiness in the world but on this ground. —I beseech you, brethren, to mark this, for it is not easily learnt. Our nature and the devil are all against it. The Bible is full of it; but we have no eyes to see it right, nor hearts to receive it, except as it is taught us from above; but a little of the spirit of it is infinitely precious, and is happiness itself to the soul: whereas the other plan, a self-righteous one, needs no explanation, no enforcing; it is born with us, presents itself obviously and naturally: it founded Popery; it founded all religions but that of the Bible: but it is accursed even in its most specious garb, and leads no souls to holiness or to heaven. A plain image you may see of the Lord's way of proceeding in all ages, in Gideon's case. Why is he first so much comforted, encouraged, attended by a gracious God with more than motherly tenderness, as was seen in the last discourse? He was called to a great work, to conquer the Midianites; a work which he was to discharge in the Lord's strength, and by faith in him. How could he accomplish this, if he had no

endearing, animating views of the Lord's presence with him, and particularly of his forgiving love? Gideon knew and felt he was a sinner, and needed the joy of the Lord to be his strength. Just so the man who means in earnest to fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil, the Midianites that murder souls, must begin with forgiveness of his sins, with peace in God, with a believing view of Jesus, to encourage his soul: that is, he must first win the laurel, and then begin the fight in some sense. He will make poor work in religion who does not so. Alas! with all the cordials of Divine love, much has a gracious God to do with us to support us in his warfare and service, so lazy, unbelieving, and faint-hearted we naturally are.

Behold, then, the Midianites invade the land; "and the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, and Abi-ezer was gathered after him." The expression is remarkable: "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon." Has this blessed Spirit, think you, come upon our generals, admirals, and great men of the land, of all parties and descriptions? I fear not. Those who feel his influence, find it too holy, too comfortable, too blessed, to think light of it. Know, then, for our contempt of the Holy Spirit the Lord is quarrelling with us. We look not for the Spirit of God, either in temporal or spiritual things. I fear we ridicule it in both, spe-

cially in the latter. Our own wisdom, such and such measures and means, are to accomplish our undertakings; and thus we worry each other; but who looks to the Lord? The truth is, the Holy Ghost is despised among us to a dreadful degree, in that God is despised; and if he give us up to be devoured by our enemies, surely it were just and righteous.

Gideon was a man of valour and understanding, there is high reason to apprehend; yet an influence, a quickening influence, he now receives from the Lord for his military business. Ye who know Christ, pray for, expect, and reverently receive the same Holy Ghost to guide you: I do not mean only in religious concerns—it is a great mistake to limit the Holy Spirit to them—but in all your ways: so shall you have good success. Oh that we were duly impressed with the Lord's gift of his Spirit! It were happy for the nation, it were happy for individuals, were this the case! And Christ died to procure the Holy Spirit for us.

And now, when Gideon blows the trumpet, "Abi-ezer gathers after him." And thus in all ages (specially in the preaching of the Gospel), when any men are peculiarly led out by the Spirit of God, he carries them victorious over difficulties, and makes others also sensible of his hand, and to follow the leaders of his own appointing.

But Gideon's faith wants strength still; and

those who know the natural unbelief of the human heart will not wonder at it. Indeed, to grow in faith, and to learn more and more to trust the Divine promises, is the true growth in grace. You have reason to think that the whole business of religion is totally unknown to you, who stand still in the matter of faith; have always thought your faith sound, sincere, and good, and have no notion of labouring after its increase. You think only of faith in the light of an assent or an opinion in affairs of religion. But, in a child of God, faith exercises itself as a living principle of the heart; and there are so many things within and without that tend to discourage his trust in God, that he has daily reason to pray, "Help thou mine unbelief;" "Lord, increase my faith." Thus Gideon, though hitherto carried out by the overbearing influence of the Divine Spirit, to gather an host, and put himself at their head against the Midianites, now finds, when the matter draws near to a decision, and he sees what a small host he has in comparison of the numbers of the enemy, that his faith in God wants strengthening to a greater degree. Two signs he begs of his God with respect to the fleece—as you may read in the story; for I shall avoid all fanciful interpretations of the fleece: the solid lesson is, that Gideon desired two successive signs, or miracles, concerning it, as means of strengthening his persuasion that the Lord would deliver his people by his hand.

And now, when, first, the dew was on the fleece only, and it was dry on all the ground beside; and, secondly, when it was dry only on the fleece, and there was dew on all the ground; he had a double testimony from the Lord, in the way that he desired. But there looks so much of prescribing to the Lord in such express petitions, that Gideon surely is no safe pattern for us to follow here. The saint himself, whose conscience was tender and quick to discern, seems somewhat to doubt of the propriety of his petition the second time, seeing he prefaces it thus: "Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once." But how gracious, how considerate, how tender is the Lord, as a loving Parent to his child! he grants the double request exactly. And the image of fatherly love is here shewn in the blessed God to us. Oh that we learnt to know him aright! We should find no parent so kind, no master so indulgent—I mean, when once we learnt to renounce our own righteousness, and receive him as our covenant God, accepting us in the Beloved. But while men stand at a distance from God, and will not be humbled before him in the Gospel way, they must never know this sweet character of the living God, which is the joy and comfort of the contrite and the humble.

See, however, what methods the Lord takes to bring both Gideon and his army to that spirit which is the soul of all virtue, depend-

ence on Himself alone. If Gideon was blameably backward to believe in God, the transaction now to be opened was both a scourge and a medicine. He was brought to simple faith in God indeed. Gideon's army was only thirty-two thousand—very small compared with the enemy's. Yet such an army has done great things; and under a leader like Gideon, a man of prowess and understanding, it might be said, that there is no such great reason to admire the interfering providence of God. Alexander set out with an army not much larger, to conquer the Persian empire; and I have read, or heard, of some great captain declaring he did not wish for an army much larger, as very great hosts tend only to confound, and are not capable of good order and government. It may be so: but the mischief is, that men are apt to set Providence aside in their thoughts, when likely means are before them; whereas, whether means be likely or not, nothing succeeds without God. How prone are men to err here! The great Searcher of hearts knows our pride. Hear how he speaks in the case before us: "The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me." This, then, is the way the gracious and all-wise God pursues to beat down the pride of self-confidence; to reduce the army of Gideon so low as to take

away all hope of their routing the Midianites by their own strength, and necessitate them to that which is the proper and the only happy condition of man, a dependence on the Lord. From thirty-two thousand they are reduced to ten thousand, by one contrivance. Still they are too many. By another contrivance they are brought (astonishing!) to three hundred men. O God, how wonderful are thy ways! Well may it be said, they are not as our ways. One would have thought Gideon had little need to reduce his numbers against so mighty a host. What a reflection on a general's understanding must it appear in the eye of carnal reason! He a general, to send away his soldiers, and bring them from thirty-two thousand to three hundred! More like a madman than the commander of an army, this warlike chief must appear to flesh and blood. But Divine faith, that precious principle, the encouragement of which is the grand lesson of all this story, speaks a very different language. "Let God be true, but every man a liar;" let him give the law, and let man submit in quietness, and repose on the Divine word with confidence. Thus the Lord has his glory; and boasting, so natural to proud man, is excluded.

And I will now shew you how this secret of bliss is learnt in the Christian life. When a man begins to think seriously and earnestly of his soul, he naturally expects that the work of his salvation is to be compassed

by the force of his resolution, by the quantity of his duties, and by the intenseness of vigour and activity. He strives, and strives in vain; nay, he seems to grow worse and worse, and finds, it may be, after years of labouring in his own strength, that he is as far from peace of conscience and victory over his lusts as ever. And I would to God the many careless ones among us would in any way begin to labour for their souls! They might then come by experience to find what I say to be true. The Lord thus leads his people by experience—for it is not by reasoning, but by experience, that we powerfully learn these things—to know that there is no health in them. Still, that which is born of the flesh is but flesh; you cannot make spirit of it. The Holy Ghost, who alone is the author of all godliness, is not received this way, but, as all Scripture testifies, by faith. And how by faith? Why thus—and he who is weary and low and humble enough to receive it, let him receive it: those who are yet too haughty for this lesson, I wish them well scourged and buffeted till they be willing to be the self-denying disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus—"Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." "Fear not, believe only." The Lord hath purposed to stain the pride of all human glory. He gives eternal life, of his mere mercy, to the vile: he sells it not for our works of any kind. To his Son alone, his spotless life and meritorious death, his agony

and sufferings, his resurrection, ascension, and intercession, he gives all the praise. He would have us feel we are nothing but hell and misery and blindness. There is in him goodness infinite, wisdom fathomless, power unlimited, grace unsearchable, mercy ever-enduring, to save you even thus. Think not that in this way all will be ruined; nay, but look to the cross of Jesus and be saved, all the ends of the earth. Believe the Lord's record concerning him only, and all shall be well. That peace and joy and love, which your own works will never procure you, is all freely bestowed in this way. Jesus shall not fail nor be discouraged, though you be. If you trust him, when you find nothing else to trust to, your desire shall be fulfilled. To be sure, the means seem unequal to the end. Gideon's three hundred men seem not equal to the business of subduing the Midianites; nay, but behold Him who quickens the dead, and calls those things which be not as though they were. Every thing is what He makes it to be. His appointment and authority will justify this method of simple faith, though nothing less than that will.—Thus the man learns the way of salvation by believing. He drops this and that hope, this and that false prop, though nature and reason plead hard to retain them, as they would in Gideon to keep his soldiers. If the soul is stubborn, and deals much in self-will and self-righteousness, probably the Lord

takes severer methods: he leaves him, to try him, that he may know what is in his heart:" he finds lust strong, his prospects dark, Satan buffeting, temptations perplexing—all a wild confusion in his soul, nothing thriving. In short, thus many of the Lord's people may have found their matters grow worse and worse, because they are slow to believe the Lord's word of promise in his Son; and they seek for victory over their sins, not that they may glorify God, which is the true end of a holy life, but that they may vaunt themselves, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me: for pride is at the bottom of their most earnest strivings; and man, since he fell from God and set up for independency, will rather do any thing than humble himself, fall helpless into the arms of mercy, and give God his glory. But the Lord does bring it about at length, in all who shall be saved. They do freely give up their own righteousness; but not till necessity obliges them: they do learn to trust in God's word of grace only; but not till they find and feel they have nothing else to trust to. Thus the loftiness of man is humbled; pride and self-will have their death-wound; Christ and his cross are exalted; man is forgiven, and has peace in believing; and a holy walk with God on principles of love is ensured. Happy ye who know this by experience! Nor unhappy are you who understand what I mean,

and are seeking in this way, for you shall find.

And, now, how lookest thou, Gideon? how disconsolate, with thy three hundred men, and the Midianitish host in all its long and terrible array before thee! But thou believest, and therefore thou shalt be established. And thus it is; that faith is the purest which simply cleaves to God in hope against all hope. This is what the Lord brought Gideon to: this all his people are brought to. Look at the xith of Hebrews: in faith those heroes all did what they did; and our Gideon's name you will find among them. Methinks I hear him, however, sigh and groan within at times, and find inward misgivings. The compassionate Lord beholds, and again strengthens his faith.

"It came to pass (vii. 9) the same night, that the Lord said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand." See another trial of faith. What! venture, in the night, among my armed foes! what madness! But the Lord commands; and the Christian life is made up of such trials. But see the Lord's considerate, father-like kindness: "If thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host" —(poor and weak as our fellow-worms are, we are made for society; and Christians are allowed, and exhorted to strengthen one another's hands by godly society)—"and thou shalt

hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host." Thus, by a method the most unlikely, was Gideon's faith to be strengthened. And the Lord often uses this method with his people; his command justifies their confident obedience. He goes down with Phurah: and the enemy "lay along in the valley, like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea-side for multitude." Gideon hears a man telling a dream to his fellow: "A cake of barley-bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell....And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon;.....for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host." O Gideon, how must thou have been ravished to hear this dream, and its interpretation! When he heard it "he worshipped." Yes, brethren; when the Lord appears to us in his winning grace and love, he bows the heart; it worships, it loves; the love of Christ constrains.

Now, full of faith, on his return to his men he says, "Arise; for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian." He divides his men into three companies, puts a trumpet into every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps in the pitchers; charging them to follow his example. They draw near; they blow the trumpets; they break the pitchers; they hold the lamps in their left

hands, and the trumpets in their right; and cry, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." Yes. Gideon trusts not to this stratagem to do the work; how should he? but to the sword of the Lord. Gideon's sword was but the Lord's instrument. In spiritual things, the sword of the Lord, or of the Spirit, is (St. Paul so tells us) the word of God. There, Christian, look: by that be ruled, on that depend. All hell fears it: the devil and all his works, and all thy sins in their guilt and power, fly before it. Use the sword manfully, and thou shalt ever find it so, to the glory of God. How unlikely that salvation should be brought about by a Babe, born as at the approaching season, of such mean appearance in the world as Jesus was! But so it is: faith in Christ incarnate still gives the victory.

God throws a terror into all the host: they run, they cry, they flee: the Lord sets every man's sword against his fellow: the discomfiture is complete. Israel all around joins in the pursuit, though they had no share in earning the victory. First Oreb and Zeeb, then Zebah and Zalmunna, princes of Midian, are taken and slain: the slaughter is immense. "Thus was Midian subdued (viii. 28) before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more: and the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon." He dies in a good old age, a true worshipper of God, and a lover of his country. After his

death, Israel, as usual, returns to idolatry, and shows horrid ingratitude both to God and Gideon, as appears by their base treatment of his family; but Gideon is gone to the heavenly city, out of their reach.

The lesson on the whole is, faith in God, steady, earnest faith. Ye have seen its success in Gideon: go ye and do likewise.

SERMON XXIII.

DECISION EXEMPLIFIED IN THE CONDUCT OF RUTH.

RUTH i. 16—18.

And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me. When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

THE history before us, so far as the text is concerned in it, is as follows. On account of a famine in the holy land in the days of the Judges, when the ancient people of God were in a very profligate and idolatrous state, Elimelech of Bethlehem went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. Whether he did right or not, for the sake of temporal bread, to leave the means of grace, and live entirely among idolaters, I shall not undertake to say, as the rectitude of things of this nature depends much on cir-

cumstances, and concerning these the sacred historian is silent. However, the success did not answer their expectations: as his wife afterwards owned, she left the holy land full, and returned to it empty. Her husband and his two sons both died in Moab; and his widow, Naomi, after ten years, hearing that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread, prepared to return to Bethlehem. Her two daughters-in-law, who were both Moabites, and both widows as well as herself, Orpah and Ruth, went forth with her. She, commending much their kindness, exhorts them to return to their own country, and not to think of settling with her in a country in which they would be quite strangers. They both reply, "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people." Thus far Orpah and Ruth seem equally firm and determined. Naomi, however, takes pains to persuade both of them to return; shews them in what an imprudent way they would act with regard to their temporal interest; and very strongly sets before them the inconveniences of such a choice.—One is tempted to blame Naomi, for being thus instrumental in hindering two apparently well-disposed young persons from joining the congregation of the Lord and the worship of the true God, the God of Israel, especially as her words prevailed with regard to Orpah: she returned back to her people, and, what is very disagreeable to think of, to her gods. But

one is not master enough of all the circumstances which would lead to a decisive judgment: and most probably Naomi took this method to shew whether either of them had any real spirit of godliness,—was really converted, in short, to the God of Israel. There is no doubt both were affectionately disposed towards her; but, unless there was in their hearts a principle of love to her God also, Naomi expected more trouble than comfort from them. If their religion was built only on regard to her, it was not likely to be lasting, nor to profit in the end either themselves or others. This seems to be the principle of Naomi's conduct; and whether she was right or not in it, it certainly in the end gave opportunity for the display of a vigour, steadiness, and firmness in Ruth which deserve to be considered, and are recorded for our instruction. Ruth clave to her mother-in-law: her sister's example, and the temporal inconveniences of her choice, deter her not. "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me. When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her."

We see, in the case of Orpah and Ruth, the difference between a religion founded on merely human affections, and one founded on affection to the blessed God. Orpah seems to have had as much natural tenderness, and carried the appearance of as much regard to Naomi, as Ruth, for a time. She loved her, and from love to her she had a sort of regard to her religion also; but it was not spiritual and genuine. Many, in our days, have a sort of relish for religion in the same manner, because of their affection for persons who are undoubtedly religious. But though for a time it be hard to see the defect in these characters, and they appear as well as the Lord's real people, yet frequently in this life their instability appears, as it did in the case of Orpah: whereas the Lord's real people, whose love to him is created by his own Spirit, and is founded on true views of his glory, goodness, beauty, and the excellency of his salvation, are uniformly his. Temporal conveniences and inconveniences move not them. They have ventured on the God of Israel: the "just God and Saviour" is their portion and hope. Let temptation, affliction, and whatever else of discouragement, come upon them, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God shall be my God," say they to the Saviour and to his flock. Persecution and prosperity find them equally true to Christ: pleasure and happiness here only they have. Nay, they may be much

tried by the Lord: he may hide his face from them: they are still on the same scent, nourish the same hope, and have the same end in view: you might as soon think of altering the course of the heavenly bodies, as the fixed, everlasting determination of their souls. But not to them be the praise: the Lord alone has done it; and he who begun a good work in them, will perform it to the day of Jesus Christ.

There is no doubt but Ruth was one of these souls. Boaz, in the next chapter, seems to explain well her character, verse 11: "Thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." This illustrates well her motives. She did literally, what in spirit every lover of Christ is called to; she forsook father and mother; and she was come to trust in the fatherly compassion and bounty of the God of Israel. "Under his wings!" tender expression: it puts one in mind of our Lord's complaint of the Jews, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" The Lord's love to poor miserable sinners that come to trust in him, is thus sympathizing, tender, and more than motherly. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have

compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget; yet will I not forget thee." Ruth was a Gentile idolater, and she seems to have been a kind of first-fruit of the Gentiles; and, to encourage our faith in him, the progress of the story shews how she was honoured indeed of the Lord; how the prayer of Boaz was amply heard for her; and how she was one of those from whom the Redeemer of men descended according to the flesh. Orpah and Ruth are, then, very striking instances, on the one hand, of a temporary religionist, who has no real love of God, and is soon induced by love of the world to lose what he seemed to have; and, on the other, of a real child of God, partaker of a Divine nature, and determined to follow the Lord for ever. The Lord help us to illustrate and improve this subject for the good of our souls!

There are two propositions, then, to be drawn from the consideration of the story.

1. He that expects to gain either credit or comfort from Christ's religion, must come, with Ruth, to trust under the wings of the Lord of Israel (for this God of Israel is Christ; and he that seeth the Son, seeth the Father also); and this must be with full purpose of heart: all things else must be given up, as dross and dung in comparison of this pursuit. The soul that would have happiness by Christ, must be determined to seek it through him alone, whatever it cost her. This we see was Ruth's settled

determination. Difficulties might be alleged; inconveniences not a few might be started: but what were all these to Ruth? she had chosen, and was determined to abide by her choice. Oh what uneasiness and woe might many seeking souls be spared, were they, like her, determined and firm! But we are tempted by some bait of the world or the devil, after we have set out in some measure to seek the Lord: some flattering idol tempts us with false pleasure; our imagination is wrought upon by some deceitful reasonings; and difficulties and terrors are started. Then, instead of cutting them short at once, saying, The Lord's people shall be my people, and the happiness he has to bestow shall be my happiness, and the Lord himself my only God, we parly with the temptations; we give them entrance into our hearts; we cherish them, in some measure; and when they have poisoned and enfeebled all our powers, and made us quite miserable with their snares and enticements, then we seek to be delivered from them, and find they will not leave us at our bidding. Indeed, still, where the soul is determined to follow on to know the Lord, these hellish inmates shall be torn from us: for "they that swallowed thee up shall be far away:" "thy destroyers, and they that made thee waste, shall go forth of thee." But how much better had it been to have cut these temptations short at their first appearance! Sin is always best resisted at its first onsets. We

should reflect what we are about; what we are in quest of; what we have in view. Do we truly and really intend to save our souls? Is not an interest in Christ necessary for this? Must not this interest be acquired in this life, in order to answer our purpose in the next? Are we not sure to perish without it? If we sit still, we die (like the lepers in 2 Kings vii.) If we turn back into the ways of wickedness, we die. Shall we then, with our eyes open, admit enemies into our bosom that aim at our ruin! In this way, a consideration of the general interest and determination of our souls would help to regulate us in the management of those particular temptations that we meet with. And did we thus treat sinful lust, and the devil its abettor, as the Lord treated his enemy, at once determined and deaf to all solicitations, "Get thee behind me, Satan," it would be seen how happy the consequences would be. Temptations, which, by not being sufficiently withstood at first, have cost godly souls months and years to subdue, would be cut short, obliged to retreat, and very little perhaps, if at all, in future molest the traveller in his way to glory.

2. But it is time to speak to the second proposition to be inferred from the story of Ruth, —That a settled determination of soul to trust in and follow the Lord God of Israel, as our righteousness, strength, and portion, can only arise from a thorough conviction of his glory

and superior excellency. Perhaps some may think what I have said under the first proposition quite sufficient. 'Let people be resolved to be good, and then they will become good.' And any one, without any knowledge of the Scriptures, can say this. But what benefit results from this merely? If this be all, where is the mystery of godliness? You might as well think that person an able physician who should content himself with giving this direction to the sick, 'Be determined to regain your health,' as call that good divinity which contents itself with exhorting men to become good and holy. This ought to be done, and I have now done it, under my first proposition; and those who feel not the evils of the Fall in them, are apt to think it quite sufficient. They will think otherwise, if ever they come to know their sinful nature, and helpless state in themselves.

There must be, then, a thorough conviction of the superior glory and excellency of the God of Israel, or men will not be determined to give all up for him. Mere mortification of sin will not effectually form the Christian character in its spirituality and devotedness. We must have God before us, as an excellent, lovely, delightful, and desirable object. And this he can be, to sinners, only in Christ. We must see Him the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely, or we shall not love him; whatever we do in religion, it will be all forced

work, and by constraint; the enmity of the heart against God will not be overcome; religion will not be pleasant to us; neither will our services, for want of the heart, be acceptable to God. Well, then, did I say, that this settled determination of soul can only be produced by a thorough conviction of the excellency of God. It matters not if persons do a thousand outward duties, unless the heart be in them; and there is no dependence to be put on people's religion at all, unless their hearts be right with God. Now, if the word of God, and the experience of all good men, are to be at all credited, the heart of every one of us is evil by nature: "there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God." Here, then, lies the necessity of the new birth. The religion which keeps this out of view, and brings it not into full and direct consideration, cannot belong to the genuine Gospel of Christ. Is not this the grand Gospel promise, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh: and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them?" Here lies also the necessity of a salvation by grace. Yes, brethren, if there be no true determination of soul to serve God without a new heart; and if our hearts be altogether contrary to this by

nature, it is evident that the work of salvation, with the whole glory of it, belongs to God; or, to speak in Solomon's language, "the preparation of the heart in man is from the Lord." Let, then, those who are convinced of the necessity of being determined in religion, seek for this determination from God, in the way of the new birth and salvation by grace. And let them take notice of the manner how the Lord brings it about. It is not by giving success to a sort of formal resolutions of their making, to abstain from this sin and that sin. Alas! how many, and frequenters of the sacrament too, go on in this manner, and still remain unconverted! But the seeking soul is brought to see *that* in Christ which overcomes the love of all sin, and which alone fills and satisfies the soul. Hence only the soul cheerfully and freely gives up all sin, finding in Christ superior treasures. And as it is with the man's choice of Christ in general for his portion, so it is with all particular cases: whatever temptations in particular occur to thwart a believer in his course, he will hardly find them effectually overcome but by particularly beholding in Christ something that is suited to give pleasure and delight of a superior kind to those pleasures of sin that entice him. Thus, what think you is the true and effectual cure of a legal spirit, that torment of decent and regular people who have been converted to the Lord? Is it not

the view of a superior, a better righteousness, the Lord our Righteousness? What will effectually overcome the lusts of the flesh, and those temptations to pleasure with which the world would corrupt us?—the sense and enjoyment of heavenly pleasures, by faith brought into the soul, and enjoyed in actual experience. What will effectually overcome the love of money?—the sense of better treasures to be enjoyed in heaven. What will effectually overcome false shame, the love of praise, and desire of esteem, which much hinder many from following Jesus?—the powerful sense of the privilege and honour of being made the children of God, and shining as the stars for ever and ever.

Thus in every thing, that fixed determination of soul which shone so eminently in Ruth, and which is absolutely necessary in order for success in the ways of God, flows and results, both in its beginning and progress, from the views of the superior excellency of Christ, and of the happiness which he has to bestow. Hence the will is delightfully determined: hence the Divine nature is received: hence faith, the evidence of things not seen, realizes them with such commanding influence, and brings heaven upon earth so really into the heart, as to overcome all sin: and when any temptation threatens to flatter or fright the soul out of the road of duty, then does the blessed God of love speak, as it were, to the believer: 'See here,

my son; here is what is better than that: look at this pleasure; give up that which is not worth thy following, and take this, which my Son's blood has bought for thee: it cost him dear to procure it for thee, but to thee it comes freely.' This sweetly determines and fixes the soul.

Thus have we shewn what Ruth had, and what Orpah had not. If affection for religious people, if natural sensibility of disposition, could have made them godly, they both had this. But something infinitely better than these things is necessary to fix the heart of man for God, — an understanding of the excellency of Divine things. Ruth had this. She saw in the God of Israel true loveliness and happiness; so that she could follow him with delight for ever. Orpah did not. Her religion went not beyond nature, and it left her in a state of nature.

Let me now speak a word or two to different sorts of people.

(1.) How many are like Orpah! They are pleased with something in religion, which makes them to follow it for a while: they are pleased also with some religious people, and thence also are induced to go on with them, outwardly, in a way of religion, as Orpah did with Naomi for a time. But how do they wither by degrees! how do they fall from that which they seemed to have! Such as these bring disgrace on religion by their bad conduct. It would be well for you to remem-

ber these two propositions:—First, that to make any thing out in religion, for comfort here or happiness hereafter, you must be determined, as Ruth was. Then temptations will, comparatively speaking, cease to solicit you: you cut them short at once, and take away their seducing power, by a fixed determination of soul. And, secondly, this determination of soul you must seek to obtain only in a way of grace, and the gift of a new heart and spirit, praying, with Jeremiah, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned." And expect it not merely as a forced, constrained thing. God wants the service of the heart, and he would have the service of the heart to be delightful and free. Expect, then, this gift of a new heart to come with the loving mercy and salvation of the Lord. Pray for the revelation of the Lord God of Israel, in his beauty, loveliness, and loving-kindness to your soul. Even in those days of a carnal dispensation, he appeared to the faith of Ruth with motherly fondness and inviting tenderness, so that she is said to come and trust under his wings. What superior advantages have you now! The Lord God has been made one of us; for us has lived, and died, and risen again, and ascended into heaven to provide mansions for us. These things has he done to win our hearts, and he has done these things in our nature. Ye that would be determined to love the Lord, dwell upon these views of his love to you in the first place, that

you may learn to love and trust in him, to bear crosses for his sake: and count the cost of a truly holy life—the contempt of the wicked, and much self-denial and tribulation—that so, having suffered with Christ here, you may reign with him hereafter. Be sure of this: whatever motive of a worldly or prudential kind influence you in religion—whether it be affection to others, as in the case of Orpah, or whatever else, if this be all, it will leave you short in the day of trial: nothing will stand the test of God's judgment, and carry a man through the self-denying course of a truly godly life, but believing views of the glory of Christ, of his salvation, and the pleasures which he has to bestow, with the earnests of them tasted here, the perfection of them expected hereafter.

(2.) A word to those who have indeed chosen this Saviour, with his cross as well as his crown, and all things that belong to the way of godliness. Often may you be tempted to think yourselves void of godliness, because of the great quantity of corruption still remaining in your hearts; but you are distinguished from the wicked by your prevailing desire to follow the Lord, and your restlessness with respect to sin. Cherish the Divine determination of soul by that which first gave it birth,—faith's view of Christ bringing into the heart the sweet sense of God's salvation. Thus shall temptations be overcome, and the truth flourish

in you: thus shall you persevere, and enjoy Gospel liberty, boldness, and delight in God's ways. When you feel the want of these fruits of the Spirit, then pray for the view of Christ and his salvation: by that only do they live and flourish. This was the method of the great grandson of the woman of whom we have this day spoken, David, the man after God's own heart. Read it, in the sixth division of the cxixth Psalm. "Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation, according to thy word. So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word. And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for I have hoped in thy judgments."

SERMON XXIV.

DAVID'S FORBEARANCE.

2 SAMUEL xvi. 5—14.

"*And when king David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still as he came. And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial: the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and, behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man. Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head. And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so? And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do*

it? Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day. And as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hill's side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust. And the king, and all the people that were with him, came weary, and refreshed themselves there.

A VERY extraordinary transaction surely! A king, the greatest and most powerful I suppose of his time, and the first character of the age—most distinguished as a warrior, a statesman, a poet; renowned for wisdom and a series of shining actions—is insulted, in the manner we have read, by one of his subjects; is treated with all possible indignity; yet he meekly bears it! He had only to nod, and hundreds of his warlike troops besides Abishai would have dispatched the foul-mouthed slanderer. But he chides Abishai for giving way to the thought: he thinks only of bearing and of yielding; and the meanest poltroon cannot be more tame than this mighty warrior. But David has one character more,—he is a saint, and surely a most eminent one. It is in that view that I would exhibit him for our use this day. His other characters may not be needful to us, nor at all attainable; but a saint you must be, however you may be disposed to sneer at the Scripture term, if you mean to arrive at the

mansions of heaven; and one eminent branch of the saint's character lies in the meek passiveness for which the man after God's own heart so distinguished himself in the story before us. Let us only beware that we do not hinder ourselves from profiting from this story, because we think David acted very differently to Shimei afterwards. The truth seems to be, that David, and other public characters of the Old Testament, did, in their regal or prophetic characters, several things, by Divine inspiration, which must not be drawn into precedents. I apprehend this plain consideration would rectify many mistakes which have been made in considering Scripture characters.

But let us see David's reasons for his passiveness; thence we may be enabled to hold him forth for an example of instruction to ourselves.

First, He considers the situation in which he then was.—His own son, Absalom, was seeking his life. An unnatural rebellion had spread through the land. And he was then, in most afflicted circumstances, fleeing from his capital into the wilderness. It seems, within a few days so extraordinary a change of his affairs had been brought about, that, from the most powerful and prosperous of monarchs, he was reduced to the lowest scenes of distress. He saw the hand of God in all this. He was obliged to bear, and was then bearing, far worse evils than the lying petulance of Shimei's tongue. Now was his time for suffering: he

must set himself to bear this among the rest. Happy were it for us, could we, like him, know, and be rightly affected by, the seasons of the Lord's visitation; and, instead of repining and resisting in vain, meekly bear and submit!

Secondly, He saw the Lord's hand in it: "The Lord hath bidden him:" "the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David; who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?"—This was not the command of God: his commands are always holy. Shimei sinned with a high hand against God in what he did, and his time of destruction came at length from the Lord; but it was the will of God that David should at this time thus suffer reproach from him. And vengeance belonged to the Lord: till he received a commission from God to punish this wicked man, he had no right to do it; and even then, when Shimei was to be punished, not a spirit of revenge, but a spirit of obedience to the Divine will, was to influence him: in the mean time, he was to bear what the Lord inflicted on him. He was innocent, it is true, of every charge with which Shimei aspersed him. Never did more foul slander (except the slander with which our Lord Jesus was traduced) proceed from the tongue of man. David had twice spared Saul's life, though Saul sought his with unrelenting rage. But what was in David's mind, think you, at this time? What was it that bowed the spirit of this mighty warrior down to meek submission?

what made *him* meek as a lamb, who had the heart of a lion? The sense of sin, brethren. "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." His very nature, he knew, was sinful; and we may suppose he had a most affecting discovery of it after it had been so horribly displayed in his adultery and murder, the punishment of which, from God, he now was meekly undergoing. David knew his salvation was of grace: he deserved hell for his sin: thankfully, then, may he bear the merciful chastisements, which would soon be over, by which his soul was training for heaven. "As many as I love," saith our Redeemer, "I rebuke and chasten;" and thrice happy they who bear the rod in meek humility and patience. It were impiety to take the work out of God's hand, by resisting. David knew the true secret of getting the victory over all our evils and miseries: it is simply bearing them, letting patience have its perfect work, till God, by his Spirit, bring all the intended good out of them. To do otherwise, is to fight against God: and it is vain to contend against his power; it is foolish to contend against his wisdom; it is rebellion to murmur against his administration; and it is ungrateful to distrust his goodness. To see God's hand, then, in our afflictions, and particularly in the slanders and ill treatment we receive from men; yet to be composed and meek, because God has done it; to accept it as the chastisement of our iniquity,

and to be humbled before the Most High; cheerfully letting him take his own course with us—oh! it is sweet and glorious work! But this fruit grows only on Gospel ground. Seek, brethren, to be born again, and to become the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, having the forgiveness of all your sins, as David had—(look at the xxxiid Psalm)—then a foundation is laid for these dispositions. But if you will not, you may exhibit some outward shew of humility and meekness, but the thing itself you will never attain. No man ever learnt acceptably to forgive others, except he was first forgiven of God himself. Many will own the beauty of some branches of the Christian character, which they themselves never attain, because they hate the principles of justification by faith in Christ and the new birth by the operation of the Holy Ghost, whence only the fruit can grow.

Thirdly, David looked forward to future times.—Divine faith bears the present, in expectation of what is to come. He was not without hope that his gracious God would look on his affliction, and that, even for Shimei's cursing, God would requite him good. And he was not deceived: even in this world he lived to triumph and to enjoy prosperity. But in the world to come, every child of God is sure to triumph. God will certainly take care that their characters shall, at the last day, appear in their proper colours: their just deal-

ing shall be brought forth as the noon-day. Let them be humbled under the rod before God for their real sins here, and they shall be everlastingly cleared before men and angels of all false charges hereafter.

Thus, a just view of the Lord's providential dispensations; a humbling discovery of his own sinfulness, productive of submission to the sovereignty of God; and patient faith in the Lord's goodness, lay at the root of the wonderful meekness of David which we see in this story. And I now hasten to improve these considerations, first, to the conviction of sinners; and, secondly, to the edification of saints.

1. Let men examine what the state of their hearts is, respecting this matter of bearing reproach, and of meekness and patience under injuries received. Do you think you do well to be angry? Does a spirit of resentment seem to become you? and have you learnt to distinguish between resentment and revenge, so that, though you will not vindicate revenge, yet you allow yourselves in resentment? Would you look on it as the mark of a mean soul, to be quite composed under calumny and reproach? Do you, without any checks of conscience, allow yourself in railing, and treating with ridicule and contempt, those who use you ill? and, provided you keep within the bounds of truth, as you think, do you deem yourself completely justified in never suffering any affront or abuse to pass unnoticed? What

views have you of God's hand in the evils you endure of this kind? Does your ill treatment, which you receive from men, humble you before God? Do you submit, and bear the reproach, as his will; and leave it to him to clear up your character? Can you say, that by this means you are helped to a deeper and more humbling view of your own sinfulness; and that you see the trespasses which your neighbour is guilty of respecting you, as nothing, compared with the heinousness of your own transgressions against God? Now, did your heart ever feel any emotions of this kind? Have you a lively idea of the Lord's sovereign dominion in the world, and the right that he has to dispose of you as he pleases; and does a sense of this cause you to be resigned under calumny and slander, as we have seen it did the man after God's own heart? And is your comfort under ill treatment derived, not from a sense of the pleasures of revenge, but from a sense of the good to your soul, which the Lord will one day cause to issue to you from it, after you have borne your portion of slander with all long-suffering?—What say your consciences to this, O ye who hate the new birth; ye who are enemies to justification, complete and full, by the righteousness of faith in Christ alone? Ye say, perhaps, that you will not revenge injuries, because ye despise them and the man that inflicts them; and that David was right in suffering Shimei to curse unnoticed, because

he was a contemptible wretch, unworthy of his regard. But this is not David's spirit; and I will venture to call David's the Christian spirit. He does not bear because he despises Shimei and exalts himself above him; but he bears because the Lord has done it, and as a sinner he is humbled before God, hoping for a happy issue from his goodness. This way of affecting to despise injuries, while the heart swells with pride, and the man exalts himself above him who has injured him, may be called prudence; but there is no piety in it, and it is a spirit which has nothing to do with the kingdom of heaven. How is it, then, with you, my fellow-creatures? for I proposed these queries with a view for you to examine yourselves whether you have the Christian spirit and temper, because without it you will not arrive at heaven. Can you pray for, pity, and love, those who hate and despise you? Deceive not yourselves with vain hopes of mercy. Mercy itself cannot save you, except it make you holy. Without meekness and humility, you could not be happy in heaven, were it possible for you to arrive there: you could there be no suitable companion for such a spirit as David's. All the real disciples of Christ obey his commands: "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." You may make mirth, if you please, of this precept, and turn it into ridicule; but you will one day find it has a deep and sober sense; and it is a badge of God's chil-

dren. "I say unto you, Love your enemies." "I say unto you, that ye resist not evil." These are our Lord's sayings. All his real disciples groan within them, that they have an evil nature which fights against all these godly principles. But they do not plead for sin; they do not allow it, in themselves or in others; they are fighting against it, even to its destruction; and they put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and so make not provision for the flesh to fulfil any of its lusts. And they learn to practise according to our Lord's precepts more and more. They shew whose side they are of. They are going on to perfection; not laying again the foundation, but building on it; till they find the path of the just a "shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." But you, who vindicate and allow all this sin, and the exertion of it in practice, surely are not disciples of Christ. You have nothing of his spirit; and if you die as you are, you will be treated as his enemies.

Now, do apply our subject, for it is to you a very serious matter. It is not worth while to lay before you a transaction in the history of a man who has been dead many hundred years, nor is it worth your while to hear it, merely as a piece of entertainment, and to exercise your critical talents on the story, and on the manner in which it is handled from the pulpit, with the same indifference, and coolness of spirit as to your own interest in it, as you

would criticise a political essay, or a dramatical production. Brethren, the work of the ministry is of importance to your souls: if a little exercise of your critical talents be all the use you make of it, you harden your souls by it, and trifle with the Lord's ordinance. You forget that you have souls; that you have little time to do the work of salvation in; and that it behoves you to make a different use of preaching;—not merely to consider whether the preacher speaks well or ill, whether his manner is gentle or severe, whether he comes up to your ideas in this point or that point, whether he is a friend to your party or denomination or not. Ye deluded souls! what will be your party and denomination, or where will you be, shortly, when God shall call you hence? Have done with nice criticisms, and a systematizing spirit, bringing every thing over to this or to that side, in a way of party notions, if you mean to grow wise in the Scriptures, wise for yourselves, holy, acceptable to God, and fit for heaven. What if God say to you, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee!" are you fit to die? I have been setting forth some marks of a holy state, and have digressed from my subject a little, with a charitable design of rebuking that soul-hardening, and abominably proud, critical spirit, which so many delight in, to the ruin of their souls, and the neglect of the true use of preaching. If your conscience assures you, that you are

entirely void of David's spirit, and your heart and practice entirely revolt against all that meek passiveness under injuries which the Son of God both practised and taught, you need go no farther for marks to know your state: as yet, you are without conversion. Number ten thousand supposed good qualities, you are in the bond of iniquity; and, if you come further to inspect your heart in the light of God's Spirit, you will see that there is no health in you; that, if you could be forgiven for all the past, your nature has no resources, it will never learn to forgive truly, to love truly. What shall you do? Are there any here who are brought to this; who feel this to be their case; who cry out, each in the bitterness of his soul, "O wretched man that I am?" Go to Christ without delay: yes, there is salvation. If you feel your need, that is quite sufficient: Jesus asks no more: you are heartily welcome to all his saving benefits. He suits you. We are bid to hold him forth to you. Look at him; and look till you know him, love him, and be like him. Look at him whom you have pierced: there is your pardon and plenteous redemption; take it boldly by faith, and it is all your own. The sense of it once felt in your soul by the application of the Holy Ghost—and if you seek, you will find it—shall give you a true taste of bliss; soften your heart; set it free to love, to serve God; humble you as the chief of

sinners, and shew you a gracious God and an eternal kingdom your own. Then shall you resign yourself to him, bear his mild will, and look above all injuries and reproaches, from a sense of His hand in them who governs all things, and of your own sinfulness in crucifying the Son of God. Thus justification and sanctification, both forgiveness and true holiness, are acquired. Christ is the way. Learn to believe on him. Precious news! he is offered to you: Be it known unto you, that through this Man all salvation is offered you. But if you will not, you sin more fatally to your souls by not coming to Christ than by all your other sins. Brethren, drop the critical spirit; apply to the cure of your own soul what has been said, and the Lord give you wisdom.

2. I would now apply what has been said of David's case to the children of God.—While you live, you are liable to be ill-treated, insulted, and railed against; to be accused, and that with great bitterness and malignity, of things of which you know yourselves to be innocent. You can scarce be more provokingly treated than David was by Shemei; accused of usurping the throne to which it was not possible for a man to have a stronger right, the particular appointment of God; accused of cruelty to the house of Saul, to whom he had constantly rendered good for evil, and whose family he cherished and preserved in his house and in his bosom.

It appears very hard to be treated thus unreasonably: but (Jesus Christ excepted) I know no pattern more proper for you to follow than this of David. A deep, humbling sense of your own sinfulness in the sight of God, and a heart-affecting view of the Lord's hand in the affliction, leading you to receive it as a chastisement from God for your sins, and meant for your good; these things more than any thing else, and nothing less than these things, will overcome your impatience, and dispose you to true resignation. The ill treatment you may be likely to receive may be considered of three sorts, and may be reduced to three distinct considerations. I shall say a word or two on each.

(1.) I wish, for the honour of godliness, it might be said that no such case ever existed as that of godly persons treating one another ill. But there has been, and is at this day, too much of it; and it has been a lamentation, and must be for a lamention. Nothing gives so much advantage to this spirit of bitterness, as the love of party and the power of bigotry. Yet even here persons can see the mote in their neighbour's eye, and be blind to the beam in their own. Are you ill-thought of and misrepresented by others who profess godliness? Do you plainly see, that, because you cannot say and do all things as they do, they misconstrue your intentions, treat you coldly at best, and even injure you in several respects? Be assured

that the hand of God is in it. He bids them do it, in the same sense as he bid Shimei to curse David. It is the gentle stroke of a Father's chastisement: he means you good. It is to mortify your pride, to humble your heart, to make you see what is in man, to exercise and improve your patience, meekness, and charity, and every way to fit you more for those purer regions, where love shall be consummate and uninterrupted, and for ever. Bear, then, this your cross, painful though it be to flesh and blood, saying, 'The Lord will look on mine affliction, and it may be requite me good for all this ill usage.'—Can you thus meekly bear, and not on every occasion proceed to earnest vindication of yourselves and retorting upon others? How much better were Christians thus employed, than in provoking one another, and, with abominable ill-nature, or at least an illiberal narrowness of mind, ascribing one another's faults to the particular principles in which they differ from those that censure them. Let me here, then, speak to all who feel any thing of the love of Jesus Christ in their breasts. For his sake, forgive and bear with one another: for his sake, strive to submit to and prefer one another in honour: for his sake, do not exalt yourselves, and your own ways and modes, above those of other denominations of Christians. Desire, all ye who love Christ, to learn what the Lord would have you to learn from the instructions

of the pulpit; and set yourselves to practise, not to criticise and compare, and say, "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas." Ah! if men were like David, humbled for their own sin; and had, like him, awful views of the sovereignty of God, from whom all events proceed, and in whose hands are the issues of all things; they would bear more, and not set themselves up, with so much spirit, as they call it, but pride it is, against every one who affronts them.

(2.) Let the children of God learn from David's conduct to bear the reproach of the wicked. Let them not think themselves bound to answer every cavil of calumny, and particularly to refute very slander. See if you know what it is to bear these things as coming from the Lord, and with a cheerful giving of your cause into his hands to be cleared up against the last day. Learn, with David, to distinguish between God's cause and your own. Do the enemies of the Lord revile his doctrines and his precepts? David answers them: he will speak for God; he will speak of his testimonies even before kings, and not be ashamed. But do they only revile him? You see how silent he is: he can patiently defer the thing: 'The last day will clear up this little concern of mine, among other things of immensely greater importance. I will leave it, then, says the Christian; and in the mean time will be studying to receive it as from my

God, and be reaping all the good to my soul which it is capable of promoting, because all things (and therefore this among the rest) work together for good to them that love God.' Let us beware, then, here, of that forwardness which takes matters out of God's hands; and let us not deceive ourselves by thinking that the honour of God is concerned in the clearing of ourselves, when it is not at all. We may easily be here deceived: we often think ourselves of vast consequence, forgetting that we are worms.

(3.) There is yet a third enemy, on occasion of whose assaults the Lord's people may observe the rule of David's patient faith and resignation,—though some of them may have little concern in it in comparison with what others have;—the devil suggests troublesome things often to their souls. And no wonder: for he goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Be not discouraged, then, though you do find distressing thoughts of evil reasonings and blasphemies against the God whom you love, which you cannot shake off. There is great reason to believe that much of this is your trial, more than your sin; that it is the devil's work. Try here the great Christian secret of bearing patiently. The Son of God himself was tempted even to worship the devil: do not wonder, then, at any horrible thoughts, however horrible, darting across your minds. Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord

hath bidden him: the Lord will look on your affliction, and requite you good for his cursing at length. View our Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect example of the resignation which has been our subject. He "suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously." He endured the cross, for the joy set before him. Suffer with him, Christians, that you may be also glorified together. To suffer, is the Christian's way to victory. Men of this world use carnal weapons: the weapons of our warfare should be those of Christ our Saviour,—patient dependence on him, and cheerful views of the land to which every step brings us nearer; the land of peace, and joy, and love unclouded for ever; where the Lamb shall feed us, and wipe away all tears from our eyes.

SERMON XXV.

DAVID NUMBERING THE PEOPLE.

1 CHRON. xxi. 13.

And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the Lord; for very great are his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man.

It will be proper to review the story of which these words are a part, that we may more clearly apply to our consciences the instruction which it contains. The kingdom of Israel was now in a very flourishing state; both the religious and civil establishments were firm and strong, under the wise and able conduct of king David. His enemies all around subdued: and nothing was wanting to perfect the felicity of his government, but a humble and thankful acknowledgment to the Author of all blessings, which might influence the people to a holy obedience. This, however, the people had not; for the beginning of the twenty-fourth chapter of the second of Samuel, where you have the same story, says, "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel; and he moved David against them to

say, Go, number Israel and Judah." The sin which David was permitted to fall into on this occasion was meant as a punishment for Israel. They had provoked God by their pride and ingratitude. Never had people more mercies in society: they had been delivered from all their enemies: their king was grown old in their service, and from his youth had ventured his life for them, and undergone a series of hardships; no man had ever served his country better, or done it more essential good, both in church and state: and yet, with an insolence and folly, not uncommon indeed among men, but often practised toward the best and most deserving, they had expelled the best of princes from his throne, driven him into the wilderness, and sought his life; and had given his dominions to his son Absalom, a youth of whom, except that he had a handsome person, one would be at a loss to find any one good thing to speak in his commendation. Though we have no particular account of their ungrateful conduct to their God, as we have to their king, we need not doubt but they must have been in an irreligious, or at least a very lukewarm state. The ordinances of godliness, which David with so much zeal supported, were not attended to with equal zeal by his subjects. Most probably they were proud and high-minded. And now "Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." See you the craft and

readiness of the enemy of souls? Why is it that mankind are so dull and slow to comprehend and watch against his devices? Rest we assured, that if, among a people professing godliness, there be found a prevailing evil, which they do not mourn for, but are puffed up and presumptuous, Satan will find it out, and produce mischief by it, if he can.

It is remarkable, on comparing the two accounts together, that Satan is in one place said to do, what in the other is ascribed to God. For, though God is never the author of sin, he may, and does at times, permit Satan to bring on sin, for a punishment to his people. His ends are holy, and as alien from those of Satan as light is from darkness. David himself listened to Satan's temptations, and gave way to a very blameable spirit of pride, inspired by Satan the author of pride, in order to punish the pride of the people, which had provoked the Lord. It behoves us with reverence to look at the Lord's dealings: they are to be adored, rather than understood. But how great the wisdom of God, which, by causing the wickedness of some to punish the wickedness of others, keeps this bad world in some order, which otherwise would be altogether a scene of confusion! How great is that patience, which bears with our perverseness, so provoking to his holy nature! How great is that goodness, which out of so much evil is continually producing good!

David was obstinately bent on numbering the people. Pride was doubtless the sin; but still it may be said, 'Was it unlawful to number the people? Was it not done by Moses in the wilderness? May there not at times be good reasons for it?' There may: but I scarcely know any thing that has more tendency to promote pride than for men to be much bent on numbering their possessions, be they what they will. A society of any kind, if much addicted to this, is in high danger of pride; so is any person in enumerating his possessions. And if men be pleased and puffed up with such things, they affront the Lord, and provoke the eyes of his glory. It always behoves us, brethren, to guard against the pride of prosperity.—There must have been something, however, not only sinful in the disposition, but in the act itself, or else a man of so little discernment in religion as Joab, the captain of the host, would not have protested against it. I apprehend the numbering of the people should have been a religious act, in which the priests were concerned, attended with the payment of a half-shekel for each soul to the sanctuary. But hear the Divine law (Exod. xxx. 12): "When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel, after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them:" and then follows the direction of half a shekel to be given by each person,

It was a wise and instructive ordinance: the Lord meant to check the spirit of pride, and cause men to feel their obligation to himself, as sinners redeemed by a price from destruction. David in his pride neglected this payment; and if the people were then as much disposed to grudge any church payment as they are among us, the tax would doubtless have been highly offensive to his subjects. You observe, however, that a plague is threatened in the Law for neglect; and a plague was the consequence in this case: "God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel." David himself, brought to a sense of his evil, before he was either warned or punished, said unto God, "I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing; but now I beseech thee do away the iniquity of thy servant, for I have done very foolishly." It is remarkable, that though a real child of God may fall into any sin through temptation, yet is there something in his conduct, when he has got wrong, which distinguishes him very much from an unholy person: David, even when sinning, may be known to be a saint. A spirit there is of serious humility, love of God, true charity, resignation to the Divine will, and trust in his mercies, which breaks out in a real saint, and which he who is not such never shews. In these qualities lie the marks of true grace: and one use of the review of the story is, to see this, and to learn what are the

genuine signs of godliness. It is not at all a right method to set actions against actions; and suppose this person to be a good man because he did a good action, and that to be altogether evil because he did an evil action. This way hypocrites may comfort themselves falsely, and saints be discouraged needlessly. Though every real saint dreads and hates all sin, yet it must be confessed "in many things we offend all." But mark whether you have David's humble spirit, which gives glory to God and takes shame to himself, as appears in this frank confession. In this life let Christians patiently bear the punishment of their iniquity, and still be hoping and looking for the best things from their gracious God. They have One with the Father, even Jesus Christ, who bears their iniquity, and is their Advocate perpetually, that they perish not.

Three things were now offered to David's choice by the prophet Gad, from the Lord;—three years' famine; or three months to be overcome by his enemies, while they pursued him; or three days the sword of the Lord, even the pestilence, and the angel of the Lord destroying through all the coasts of Israel. "And David said unto Gad, I am in a great straight: let me fall now into the hand of the Lord; for very great are his mercies: and let me not fall into the hands of man." Two signs of a truly regenerate mind are—and they are the capital signs—faith in God, and love to our

neighbour. Both these appear in "the man after God's own heart" in a great degree in this answer. Even the sin into which he had rashly fallen through pride and vain-glory, gave occasion to this exercise of grace in his soul; for God makes all things work together for good to them that love him. He knew the Lord, and therefore trusted in him; for "they that know thy name will put their trust in thee." It is awful to think how little God is known in a depraved world. Every one asserts in words, that God is good and wise and just and merciful: few know him so; for few have any real acquaintance with him. Men are apt to content themselves with some general superficial notions of God's goodness, with which tradition or education may have furnished them, and which are faint and ineffectual in practice. Hence, when men come into distress, they can find in their heart to trust any bruised reed, any creature like themselves, and have recourse to a thousand wretched cobwebs and vain expedients, rather than trust the Lord: and hence it is, that in trouble they are so little disposed to seek God by prayer. The heart is naturally thus full of unbelief; and in every unconverted man, God is so distant from his thoughts that he has no confidence, no expectation from him. Let appearance of help come from men, from our own means and contrivances, and we think it worth attending to; but it seems to many

cold comfort, to tell a man to go to God in trouble. And why so? because men have not faith. There is a very plain declaration, "Call upon me in the time of trouble; so will I hear thee, and thou shalt praise me." Why are such things written, if they are not to be made use of in time of need? But many thanksgivings are due to God; his mercies have been thus experienced from age to age by thousands: and those who have known God thus by experience, know him indeed to be gracious, and learn to trust him in all future trials. But it is a miserable thing for a man to call himself a believer in God, and to live quite in the dark and in uncertainty, and in trouble to make no applications to God. What is this but Atheism in practice? And if men would examine the feelings of their minds, and seriously consider what use they have made of the notions they have of God, they might come to see what is the real state of their souls. For he who knows God indeed, knows him to be worthy of all confidence. God has shewn him his glory in the face of Jesus Christ, by Divine illumination. He discovers his holiness, justice, wisdom, faithfulness, and mercy. There is every thing in God that can attract his heart. In the day of distress he sought the Lord, and found him merciful in pardoning his sins, and shewing him redemption by the covenant of grace; and when all help failed, the Lord enlightened his mind,

and made him both see the nature of true happiness, and gave him power to take possession of it. He delivered him from his strongest enemy, from the rage and malice of Satan: he brought him into a place of liberty; and from time to time he saved him marvellously, by his own power, of his own grace, and in a way and manner which shewed that salvation was of the Lord. Even when he had provoked the Lord by his sins, he found his chastisements to be gracious, even those of a Father, for good; and many providences through life he has experienced, which convince him that the Lord is good and gracious beyond measure. Shall not he, who, like David, knew this by Divine teaching, and through certain experience, trust himself with so good a God altogether, without terms and without reserves? He does so in this case. The strait was great indeed; and the just punishment, both of his own sin and the people's, required it should be so: yet he trusts in God: 'Let me fall now into the hand of the Lord. Were I to choose the evils of war or the evils of famine, I might help myself by the arm of flesh, and by various expedients; but I choose the pestilence, in which man can absolutely do nothing. It is best, I feel it the best for me, to fall wholly into his hands. There is an excellency and a loveliness in the Divine character so great, that surely a creature is in the best place when he gives himself

wholly up to him. Surely Infinite Wisdom, Power, and Goodness, as it can have no temptation to do wrong, will do exactly what is right. He will do in this strait what is for the best: the more I wholly give all up to Him, and trust him thoroughly, without retaining any will of my own, the better. His mercies I know are very great: it cannot be said how great they are. Let me fall into the hands of Infinite Mercy: let me not fall into the hand of man. Man has neither the wisdom, nor the strength, nor the compassion which I expect from the Lord.'

Such were the sentiments of David; and in this way he shewed the spirit of faith in God, which was, as I said, the first sign of a truly godly spirit. I am persuaded there are of you here, brethren, those whose hearts go along with David. You think afflictions from a God of love better for you than the greatest riches. In cases of comparison between God and man, you have not a doubt which you should trust in. The very frowns of your God are preferable to the smiles of men; and you know his mercies to be great. I am speaking to men who have tasted that the Lord is gracious. When you consider how you have provoked him from time to time, and view the deep corruptions of your own heart, and the various aggravations of your offences, nothing can relieve you but a view of these great mercies of God. In Christ you behold them to be a

sea without a shore; so that you dare trust still in God, who pardoneth iniquity, and who delighteth in mercy. Therefore you will, while you have the real Christian frame about you, honour him with your confidence; in the darkest seasons harbour the best thoughts of God, and hope in his name, for his saints like it well; and in every strait will think it the safest way to walk in that track which most honours God with your confidence, and leaves man nothing to depend on. This was David's way, evidently, in choosing the pestilence rather than the famine or the sword; and, if I have entered aright into his spirit, and laid it before you, I have shewn you that which in all cases of difficulty is highly worthy of your imitation. And assure yourselves, no man ever lost by honouring God, and trusting himself altogether with Infinite Wisdom. The crooked nature of man is unspeakably averse to it; but it is a lesson which richly repays all who learn it. As to man, he may fancy himself very generous, very compassionate, and very good; and so many wicked men fancy themselves to be, and at a distance, in imagination, please themselves with the idea of their own benevolence and humanity: and in all this, the proud, blaspheming heart of fallen man is apt even to swell against the Most High, and to look on itself as more kind than He, especially when it looks at the miseries with which the earth is replenished. Men

consider not here, the goodness of God even amidst his severest punishments; they consider it not, because they see not the evil of sin which requires these severities: if they saw themselves in a just light, they would be amazed at the patience and goodness of God toward a guilty and provoking world. For which of us, now, would bear to be insulted and despised and affronted, for a course of years, by a poor person whom we fed and clothed all the time? We may talk of our pity, but it is soon exhausted: a little ill treatment which we meet with is apt to extinguish our compassion; experience is shewing this every day. Had God no more mercy on us than we have on one another, we had long since been consumed. Let us know God better, from his word and from experience; for we shall never trust him as David did till we do know him. It is specially in the Gospel of Christ that he is to be known; there his goodness shines unspeakably. O that we had hearts to relish it, and praise him for the same.

But if there be any here who think themselves truly merciful and bounteous to their enemies by nature, let them try it by actions. It is not saying, 'I really forgive all the injury done to me;' it is not this, that will prove that you do forgive. But when injuries are daily and hourly repeated, can you forgive? Ah no! But, swearer, drunkard, Sabbath-breaker, liar, whoremonger, thou art daily provoking God

by insults; yet he has patience with thee, feeds and maintains thee on earth, and even now calls on thee to repent, and offers thee mercy by Jesus Christ. Such is the mercy of God! take heed that thou provoke him not to destroy thee utterly. And a right view of this mercy not only produces faith in God, but also true charity to our neighbour, by leading the regenerate soul to imitate the kindness he has received from God, in his measure, by loving and forgiving his neighbour: for when selfishness reigns, charity can have little place; and man is naturally selfish. To be delivered from the dominion of selfishness is a great mark of growth in grace; for it is but too evident, of many who profess godliness, that they are taken up too much with themselves to study the good of their neighbour. True charity reigns in you, brethren, when you can sincerely rejoice in the conversion of sinners to God, without any studious concern in what way or line it be brought about. But if you will not allow any good to be carrying forward but it must be in your way; or if you rejoice in the spreading of a party, rather than in the conversion of sinners; this is not charity, but selfishness.

I said that David, in the text, shewed both faith and love, which are the two great signs of godliness. Let us, having sufficiently observed the former, cast an eye on the latter.

Had he been selfish, he had chosen either

the famine or war, sooner than pestilence. As a king, and opulent, he could have kept himself and family from feeling the famine; and in the other judgment, of the sword, he might have found means to secure his own person. But, O admirable charity! he chose the pestilence, in which he was as much exposed as the meanest subject. Is this your spirit? You need not, brethren, perplex yourselves with looking out for many signs of grace. "The grace of God is exceeding abundant, with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." If you have faith and love, with David, you are after God's own heart, with all your infirmities, even as David was. A real child of God wants not to be excused from his share of suffering with others. If he is a merchant, he desires not to gain by defrauding the revenue; or by supplying the enemies of his country, to enrich himself and family with the losses of his nation: he chooses to be on an equal footing of suffering with others: he loves God and loves his neighbour, and cannot bear to think of thrusting off any part of the national burdens from his own shoulders to those of others. Here, brethren, is charity, true, unfeigned, and solid, when it is built on faith in Christ, and the man is truly humble before God. Let us learn these lessons from God, and they will profit us eternally.—The Lord sent the pestilence: seventy thousand Israelites fell. God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem; but, as he

was destroying, the Lord repented him of the evil, and said to the angel, "It is enough; stay now thine hand." Here is that mercy of God on which David rested. The plague was wholesome to the land, in humbling men, and teaching them to know God and their duty: and the Lord shewed that he did not afflict willingly. David now, seeing the angel of the Lord stand between the earth and the heaven with a drawn sword, humbled himself before God—as you may see in the seventeenth verse—owning that the sin was his, and excusing the people, and praying the Lord his God to punish him and his family, and spare the people: and here, again, you see the strength of Divine charity and humility united.

But it is not the exercise of any graces or virtues, however shining, in man, that can atone for sin. This you learn every where in Scripture. Sacrifices must be offered, typical, as all sacrifices were, of "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Nor is there any account to be given of the prevalence of sacrifices among all nations, but this, that they rose from a tradition, derived from the patriarchs, of the Divine institution of sacrifices, which even in the vanities of idolatry has not been lost among men. By the direction of the Lord, David built an altar to the Lord in the threshing-floor of Ornan—which he refused to receive without full cost—and offered burnt-offerings, and called on the Lord; and

he answered him from heaven by fire, the well-known token of Divine approbation; and the Lord commanded the angel to sheath the sword.

It is one of the truest properties of a real saint, to improve every providential hint, every circumstance he meets with in life, even his errors and his sins, into some wholesome lessons for the time to come. This David does. Charmed with the Lord's merciful acceptance of his sacrifice at mount Moriah—for there was the threshing-floor of Ornan—he said (in the beginning of the next chapter), "This is the house of the Lord God." He begins immediately to prepare for the temple, which his son Solomon was to complete; and this spot of ground, on which his offering was accepted, was that on which the temple was afterwards erected. It perpetuated, indeed, the memory both of David's sin and of the plague; but to an humble soul that would be no grief. David would, doubtless, rejoice that the Lord's grace and goodness were commemorated thereby.

If I have dealt pretty largely in recounting and remarking on this history, it should be remembered, that doctrine and exhortation are heard from Sabbath to Sabbath on the general subjects of the Gospel, and, therefore, historical instruction may, at times, afford a useful variety. Moreover, I willingly would use any method to induce both professors of religion and careless persons to read and at-

tend to something more of the Scriptures than a bare text. I am certain that the duty of reading the Scriptures is far less observed than it ought to be. Some persons, of a religious turn in some degree, are contented to continue shamefully ignorant of the Sacred Book; and careless persons neglect it altogether. It is not a flash of conviction now and then, or a warm motion of the animal spirits, that makes a Christian. No: he is one whose delight is in the law of God, and who meditates therein day and night: he is the solid Christian: he brings forth fruit in season, and his leaf shall not wither, and whatever he doth shall prosper. He may, and he too often does, stumble and slide, as David; but the principle of Divine life, nourished perpetually by the Holy Spirit conveying sap into his soul through the Divine word constantly read and studied, remains in him, and he rises again and again. You see this in David, a true child of God; who is not an angel, but a sinner, in a state of infirmity and imperfection here on earth, but redeemed by the blood of Jesus, and renewed in the spirit of his mind; humbled under a sense of his sins, yet trusting in his God, from a settled knowledge that he has of his goodness. Hence he chooses to fall into his hands altogether, and trust himself to His conduct who brings good out of his evils, and improves and ripens him more and more for glory. Be not discouraged, though you ought

to be humbled, under a sense of your evils, ye who fear the Lord and know his grace. Go on to believe, to love, to be resigned to his government and will; and your latter end, like David's, notwithstanding all your trials, shall be sweet and glorious.

SERMON XXVI.

THE FALL OF SOLOMON.

1 KINGS xi. 4.

For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.

How are the mighty fallen! What is man! how soon, how easily, does he yield to temptation, even after the most exalted attainments of holiness, and the brightest and most comfortable manifestations of Divine grace! If there were such a thing as security from the power of temptation in any circumstances, one should think Solomon, the wise; Solomon, the highly favoured of the Lord; Solomon, the son of the man after God's own heart; who, in his own and in his father's case, had tasted so much of the goodness of God; that he would surely never forsake the Lord. But he fell! and fell in the foulest manner of any saint recorded in Scripture. It is not pleasant, but it is useful, to take notice of these things: the carelessness of too many from whom better things should be expected, and their easy security,

as if it were not possible for them to fall, though they never had so firm an establishment in grace as Solomon, makes it highly fitting that these things should be attended to. It is not your entertainment, but your profit, that is to be sought. I shall, as briefly as possible, first, state the case of Solomon's fall before you, and also from what a height he fell; and then, secondly, deduce four practical inferences from the subject. And may that God of the everlasting covenant, who puts his fear into his people's heart that they may never depart from him, alarm our hearts and quicken our souls with the wholesome cautions, "Be not high-minded, but fear;" "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall!"

1. Of Solomon, the son of David, it is said, from his infancy, that the Lord loved him, and that he loved the Lord. When he was asked by his gracious God, what he desired, he shewed, indeed, like a true child of God, that his taste was divine and excellent. He asked no worldly things; but he asked wisdom: and the Lord gave him wisdom, and riches too, above all men on the face of the earth. For forty years, till his old age at least, did he reign the delight of mankind. Had we seen and known by experience the wisdom of his government and conduct, we should have been amazed beyond expression to think that he should ever become an idolater. He was honoured, too, to build that glorious edifice to

the Lord, which was the admiration of the world: and such a prayer did he offer at the dedication of it; so full of the honour of God; so humble, so reverential to God; expressing such affection to his subjects, such fatherly admonitions to them; such a grateful sense of past mercies! Could Solomon ever fall?—If you look now at his writings; in that small portion of them which has come down to us, what striking indications are there of Divine wisdom! Could he, who speaks so much of wisdom, grow himself at length unwise? Could he, who appears so conscious, as his Proverbs shew him to have been, (as there is no probability but that many of them at least were written before his fall, if not all of them,)—so conscious, I say, of the snares of sin, and so tender and earnest in guarding young men against lewdness,—so eminently wise and guarded in this respect; could he himself fall so foully by them at length, a very proverb of apostasy?—And if we look at Solomon's Song, and follow the ideas which the wisest and the most holy, in all ages, have had of it—viz. that it represents the communion of Christ and his church—could he, who entered with such spirit and vigour into that precious communion; who spoke such charming things of Christ, and described so particularly his ways and dealings with his church; whose very heart appears enraptured with the beauty of holiness: could he leave the Lord of Israel for Chemosh

and Molech, abominable idols? O Solomon, what a fall! What words can describe the strength of that indwelling sin, which, aided by temptation, can bring about the fall of the wisest of men! What a snare is uninterrupted prosperity! No saint had so much of it as Solomon, and no saint that we read of ever fell like him. Who will trust to good sense and knowledge, since wise Solomon is become the foolish dupe of wicked women, and a worshipper of them that are no gods? Who will trust to the wisdom and experience of old age, since in old age the wisest of men falls from God? Then "his wives turned away his heart after other gods!"

But sin gets not to its height at once. Solomon, in the multitude of his wives, which I should grieve to recount unto you, has already broken one precept of the law. Speaking of the king, Moses says, "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away." (Deut. xvii. 17.) Surely Solomon broke this: and his heart was turned away. The expression is remarkable: "His wives turned away his heart after other gods." Not only his body, but his *heart*, was turned after these gods; which, I think, confutes the notion of those who may fancy that it was only in complaisance to his wives that he built those places for their idol gods, supposing it impossible that such a wise man as Solomon should ever think there was any real Divinity

in them. They little know the deceitfulness of the human heart, the stupifying, hardening, and bewitching nature of sin, and the subtilty of Satan, who imagine so. There is no wickedness—we ought to know and fear for ourselves—there is no wickedness, however horrid, however absurd, but man, any man, may fall into it. Good sense is no security against it. It is not by native good sense, but by grace divine, humbly relied on, that men are secured from sin. The ready way to fall into foul sin is, to begin to presume it impossible we should fall into it. If Solomon's *heart* was turned after those gods, he doubtless reverenced them, and worshipped them sincerely, in one sense, as it may be said: he forsook the Lord, and worshipped those vile abominations. Whoredom takes away the heart, as he expresses it in his Proverbs; it stupifies and besots the mind; and if the Spirit of God be once grieved, and Solomon, with all his wisdom, be left alone, where is he! He has lost the sweet sense of true happiness in communion with the just and holy, that is, the true, God; and, false and impure pleasure having debauched his understanding, he has no relish, no heart, for the worship of a holy God. Unholy gods, whose worship is consistent with the service of sin, suit better such a heart. Had he stuck close to God and true pleasure, he would have scorned such gods. Many have fallen in like manner. Having corrupted

their ways, a false worship now suits their taste. Thus, "his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father."

By comparing these two men together, you see how much viler in the sight of God it is to sin against the first four Commandments, than against the last six. First-table sins, though little thought of, are the most grievous. David had committed adultery and murder—horrid crimes!—yet his heart is still allowed to be perfect with his God, on the whole, in general, through his life. It will be an uncandid way of representing things, should any fancy, because I affirm, as my text allows me to affirm, that idolatry is a greater sin, perhaps immensely greater, than murder, that therefore I would lessen the evil of the latter: far from it. Sins against our neighbour are dreadful—more so than those who affect to place all sin in them only, are apt to imagine: if men die in these sins, they will be ruined by them; but, then, to disbelieve the word of God, to dishonour him by a false, self-righteous, or idolatrous religion, these things, though to many they seem no sin if a man is sincere in them, are the worst of sins. The idolatry of the Old Testament, and the self-righteousness of the New, agree in their foundation; because accursed pride will be meddling with Divine things, and men devise for themselves religious forms and

views by which they want to bring God in as their debtor. God is affronted indirectly by theft, lying, murder, and sins against our neighbour; but by unbelief and false religion he is affronted directly. Men cannot be proud of the former sins, nor vindicate them; but they are proud of the latter, and strive to justify them. And oh that our eyes were opened to see these things in a true light; that men may see, that by those things in which they think the best of themselves they are the most abominable in the sight of God! To conclude this matter, when David fell by murder and adultery, he proved himself in those instances an undutiful servant of God: but he never forsook his worship and service for idols, all his days. The Holy Ghost takes notice of this to his honour; and says, his heart was perfect with God: but Solomon forsook the service of God himself, and proved a traitor.

2. I should now proceed to the practical inferences. But perhaps you may be inquiring, whether Solomon recovered by repentance. I can say but little to this: we have no positive account that he did—his fall is left more striking and awful on that account—only it is generally thought that his Book of Ecclesiastes, which appears to be the work of an old man, was written after his recovery. It seems probable; and, if so, he doubtless recovered by repentance. And those who believe, with the

Apostle Paul, that where God has begun a good work he will perform it to the day of Jesus Christ, must believe that Solomon, who once loved the Lord, was recovered by grace. How great that grace! But the danger of falling, and the strong instruction it affords us, remain in full force: and it seems to branch itself into four practical inferences.

(1.) From the comparison here made between the sins of the father and the son, I infer, that sins against the first table of the Ten Commandments exceed in wickedness, perhaps immensely so, sins against the second table. Solomon's heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. Idolatry was the fall of the Son; murder and adultery, of the father. But what a remarkable difference of heart does the Holy Ghost point out! David's heart continued, on the whole, perfect with the Lord his God; Solomon's not so. Is it not hence plain, that to worship idols, to despise the worship and service of God, and to blaspheme his name, or to support a false religion, is more provoking in the sight of God, more affronting to his glory, and more evidential of pride and wickedness of heart, even than to commit murder or adultery, or to deceive and defraud and slander by word or deed? There is such a narrowness in some minds, that, to prevent misconstruction, I think it needful again to remind you, that I mean not to lessen in your eyes the

vileness of murder, adultery, theft, and falsehood. They are horrible, damning sins, if not repented of; and far worse, and more detestable, even than those imagine who confine all sin to them. But yet it behoves a Christian minister to tell men that there are deeper and more dreadful sins than they; sins of which this age is full, and is yet so blind as in a measure not to see them to be sins at all. They are Solomon's sins; and idolatry is their nature. When men expect to be saved for giving alms, for going to church and sacrament, and for some outward decencies of behaviour, they are idolaters: the god they worship is as much an idol as Chemosh and Moloch, the abominations into whose worship Solomon was seduced. We preach Christ crucified: we point him out as the only way to God, the only righteousnesss of sinful men. We press the necessity of trusting God through him alone, of glorifying the Father through the Son; and also of depending solely on the Holy Ghost for holiness of heart and life. When, instead of this, men fancy to themselves a tame, easy God, who will allow men to please themselves in their sins here, and yet not punish them in the world to come; when they deny the eternity of hell torments, as unjust and cruel; when they despise the Godhead of the Son, and think they honour him sufficiently by making him only a good man; when they depend on their own strength and

wisdom, in order to become holy and virtuous, and ridicule the operations of the Holy Ghost as enthusiasm; indeed, brethren, here is unbelief, and self-righteousness, and idolatry, as real as ever Solomon's was: for idolatry has various shapes and circumstances. And let them know, the god they worship is an idol; and that these sins are so far from being trifling, or consisting only in harmless opinions, that they have damnation in their nature, and, by my text, are more damnable than all the sins I can commit against my neighbour. And if such men be liberal and humane (for charitable they cannot be), yet are they the enemies of God, and are, I doubt not, more wicked in heart, and more abominable, because of their accursed pride, in the sight of God, than all the whoremongers, thieves, and murderers, as such, in the world. If it be not so; if it be, as this age will have it, that, at worst, they are only mistaken in opinion; to what purpose was Christianity given? Why bled the Son of God on the cross for our sins, if faith in him be not supremely necessary? What does all the Bible mean? Why do we preach Christ at all? As well might I translate to you some moral pieces of Socrates or Cicero from Greek and Latin, and give you them in English for your entertainment, if morality be all that is needful. That which is called morality, is needful, brethren, in its place; and I hope it is not neglected by us in

our ministry; but let men know, it is neither the whole, no, nor the chief part, it is but a very small part of Christianity. And as without the right knowledge of God, and faith in him, through Christ, men cannot even practise morals aright—as we must begin with God before we can come down to our neighbour in duty—I would charitably, yet earnestly, press on you all, and more particularly on the politer part of my audience, who are too apt to make humanity their God, their all, and to neglect Christian mysteries; I would press, I say, on you all to attend to the Gospel—to study it with prayer—to search the Scriptures—to consider the vast importance of this knowledge, and the necessity of being taught it of God by his Spirit, and the many difficulties with which it is encompassed, through the world, the flesh, and the devil. Seek for a real acquaintance with the true God; to know him aright by the Gospel of his Son; to feel your sinful state by nature; and to obtain that precious faith from above, by which you may be washed in Jesus's blood, and become partakers of a Divine nature. Oh, consider: without this you are indeed idolaters, you worship an unknown God, and nothing you do is acceptable to him. Oh that it may be given you to feel these things, and turn to God and live!

(2.) The evil of lewdness appears strongly from this story. Nehemiah saw it in this light, and thus rebukes the Hebrew offenders, in his

last chapter: "Did not Solomon, king of Israel," says he, "sin by these things; yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God:.....nevertheless, even him did outlandish women cause to sin." Holy Nehemiah thus gives the force of the inference. If even Solomon was seduced this way, who can indulge with safety? I wish I knew some method of stemming in any degree the foul torrent of the times. Impudence and fornication are dreadfully, amazingly, strong among us. These evils have increased of late years. May God put it into the hearts of our magistrates, or raise up some Nehemiahs to deliver us! In the mean time, let young persons have a constant, jealous care. Solomon's own fall does not lessen the value of his inspired writings. The seventh chapter of Proverbs deserves, in particular, to be engraven on the heart of every young man. Let those of you who fear God be careful of this snare. Make a covenant with your eyes and your tongues; and choose rather to be censured as blushing rustics, than admired as genteel-behaved men, according to modern ideas of gentility—what in truth ought to be called impudence. Remember, if your hearts run away after false pleasure, the pleasures of communion with the holy God will grow insipid to you; and literal fornication may lead you to spiritual whoredom, as it did Solomon.

(3.) And ye who are now walking with God

in the faith of the Gospel, and are full of prosperity, and who find riches begin to increase, oh tremble at the danger of pride and security. You are, as it were, riding on billows, or fixed on the top of a mast. Can man withstand prosperity? All that can be said is, the things that are impossible with men, are possible with God. But the heart of man is wonderfully seduced by it. Let a man in adversity feel a little of his sinfulness, and grow somewhat cautious, and considerate, and serious toward God; yet let some honour, riches, and prosperity be conferred on him, and it is a thousand to one but he forgets all, grows haughty, insolent, and proud, and hardens his heart against God. This is so universally the tendency of human nature, that, by the bye, it is a high proof that we are born in sin, as the Scripture describes; because, if our moral constitution was right, we should behave better toward God in our prosperity, since he is so kind to us, and gives us such strong calls for gratitude and thankfulness. What can be said to shew the danger of prosperity more plainly, than Solomon's case? who so prosperous, who fell so foully, as he? His father David was a man of affliction in the early and in the latter part of his days; his piety appears the brightest in these: in his middle days, which were days of prosperity, he also foully fell. Let not God's people be puffed up by prosperity; it is rather a mark of God's neg-

lect of us, than of his loving-kindness, if we be not chastised. And learn resignation, ye afflicted saints; nay, bless God from the ground of your hearts for your sufferings, whatever they be. Be assured, they are among your choicest mercies, and keep you from falling, with Solomon. Be patient with your cross; and be thankful too, till you safely arrive at home.

(4.) I just mention, lastly, what a strong principle indwelling sin is! Many years of holy walking with God have not destroyed it out of Solomon. The serpent is within us, and will sting bitterly, if opportunity be given, after years of watchfulness. How can we be so careless? Awake, brethren, and fight against indwelling sin; and keep your hearts with all diligence all your days.

SERMON XXVII.

ASA'S UNBELIEF REBUKED.

2 CHRON. xvi. 8, 9.

Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely on the Lord, he delivered them into thine hand. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly; therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars.

NEXT to the study of the word of God itself, I apprehend there is no literary employment of the human mind so free from the danger of abuse, and every way so serviceable, as history. It is the volume of Divine Providence, in which the attributes and dispensations of God are exhibited, and precedents are afforded of every thing that is good, as well as beacons set up to warn us against every evil. But if history in general be so instructive, much more instructive is the history of the Bible, recorded by Infallible Wisdom; which points out to us the dealings of God himself, and acquaints us with the part which He takes in all the trans-

actions of human life. Particularly useful in this view is the Second Book of Chronicles, whence I have selected the passage of the text that relates to Asa king of Judah. The two former chapters acquaint us with the prosperity of this great prince while he relied on the Lord, as in all the transactions of his reign in general, so in particular with respect to his victory over the Ethiopians. We have his prayer before the engagement, in the fourteenth chapter, which deserves our particular attention, as it well illustrates the text: "Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude: O Lord, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee." The success answered according to this prayer of faith; for then only, when God shall cease to be God, will the prayer of faith be disappointed: "The Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa,.....and the Ethiopians fled." Notwithstanding this glorious experience of the benefit of reliance on the Lord, we find this good prince, in the latter part of his life, shamefully failing in that grace in which he had excelled. For, Lord! what is man, even the best of men? "in thy sight shall no man living be justified." There are several instances of this shameful failure in the sixteenth chapter; but let us confine our attention to that of the text.

Baasha, the idolatrous king of Israel, commenced formidable hostilities against him. What ought he to have done? what would his former experience have dictated to him to do? To have prayed to the Lord, committed his cause to him, have taken no steps in the use of means but according to the law and direction of the Lord, and have fought against his enemies only in his strength. Did not this succeed, O Asa, against the Ethiopians? Is thy God diminished in power, wisdom, and goodness, since that time? Has his faithfulness, to save those that trust in him, come to an end? Is he not "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever?" Then why dost thou put such a slight upon thy God, as to apply to Benhadad, the idolatrous king of Syria—which thou mightest have known to be contrary to the will of God—and depend on him, rather than God, to save thee from thine enemies? The success may seem to answer thy expectations for a little time (the ways of sin do thus deceive men with promising appearances at first), but the end will be gall and bitterness. Thy God is displeased, and thus rebukes thee, by the prophet Hanani; "Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the Lord thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely

on the Lord, he delivered them into thine hand. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly; therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars."

By this time it appears what it is to have the heart perfect towards God—not, to be sinless (Asa was far enough from being so), but to rely on the Lord for and in all cases, as he had done in the Ethiopian war, when he said, "We rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude." We see, too, what was the effect of Asa's unbelief,—he displeased God: his carnal policy, to which in his self-sufficiency he had trusted rather than to God, was productive of bitter consequences; and war and trouble were his lot, instead of that peace and prosperity he had hitherto enjoyed. Thus the Lord chastises his dearest servants; and by this their iniquity is purged, and this is all the fruit to take away their sin, and to make them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

There is a striking uniformity in the dealings of God with his people in all ages: in the works of his providence and grace, in outward and inward trials, the same causes produce the same effects; and, in particular, the lesson exemplified in the text is evermore true,—namely, that a patient and steady dependence on the Lord is ever crowned with success in

all trials whatever; and that a neglect of this, attended, as it always is, with self-righteous, or in other respects unlawful, schemes to deliver ourselves out of our troubles, always brings on vexation of spirit, displeases God, and, instead of relieving from any burdens, multiplies and embitters them exceedingly. Oh that this lesson were engraved on the hearts of all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ! You were not led to exercise *one single* act of faith only, in calling on him at first to save you from your sins, with a design that you should afterwards live a life of self-dependence and self-sufficiency. No: if you would be holy, lively, and comfortable, you must live by faith in Christ daily and hourly, maintaining constant communion with him, and undertaking nothing without him; for in him must be all your strength from first to last. You were not made sensible of your natural poverty and helplessness, on your first conviction, to the end that, after believing and receiving his grace, you should begin to be something in your own eyes, and not have so much occasion to depend upon him now as formerly. No: who more mistaken than those who think so? Still, in you, that is, in your flesh, dwelleth no good thing. Asa's past deliverance from the Ethiopians has not made him one jot richer or stronger in himself to withstand Baasha: so your stock of past experiences and graces give you no more sufficiency

in yourselves, against the world, the flesh, and the devil, than you had at first. The Christian life is a life of faith in Jesus to the end: for it is written, "The just shall live by faith." What a lesson does Asa's experience give you of good success in the humble way of believing, of ill success in the proud way of self-sufficiency! Believe it, thus it always has been, and will be. May we be enlightened to feel the power of this truth, and have our minds brought into captivity to the obedience of it. To this end, let us consider, more particularly, 1st, how the Scripture views of Jesus Christ, and, 2dly, how the experience of all who know what vital godliness is, correspond with the case of Asa.

1. The lesson inculcated in the history before us is, a quiet, patient, unreserved reliance on the Lord, in all cases whatever of trial or difficulty. Now this reliance, in order to be effectual, must be grounded aright, and the understanding must be enlightened to see the safety and propriety of such reliance; for if there be no warrant for it, it is folly and presumption. But, blessed be God! there is; and this is, in brief, the Scripture view of Jesus Christ, which calls to a reliance thus extensive, and promises certain success.

Are you weary, brethren, of hearing of Jesus Christ? Does it disgust you, that, whatever our subject be, still Jesus Christ should be introduced as the capital figure, to give law

and order to every thing in the subject? If you know not what it is to be poor and mean in your own eyes, no wonder you are disgusted. But God help you to know yourselves, and you will feel that every religious meditation in which Jesus Christ makes no figure, is like the husks that the swine did eat, in the parable of the Prodigal. We would "preach, not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." We being sinners, and obnoxious to the wrath of God, how can we trust in the Lord, and rely on him in all the trials and crosses of life, except we be first reconciled to him; and how shall we be reconciled to him but through Jesus, in whom alone God is reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them? Thou, then, who wouldst learn the duty and taste the comfort of reliance on God in thy trials and distresses, must first see that thou come to him by faith in the crucified Redeemer for the pardon of thy sins, that, being justified by faith, thou mayest have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And oh may those who never felt a need, a desire of this, who are living in all the unbroken pride of self-righteous nature, be persuaded to learn this first lesson, that they may become Christians, and so be fitted to act like Christians!

To believers, then, I would say, would you learn the duty of reliance on God in all the

troubles of this life, you must learn it by looking to Jesus. See what he is. To you, who have fled for refuge to him, he sustains such offices, and is engaged to perform such promises, as are every way suited to produce in your souls an unlimited dependence upon him. He is ascended to your Father and his own Father, to your God and his own God. He is your forerunner, having gone to prepare mansions for you. Life or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's. Behold God the Father: he is well pleased with you for Jesus's sake. He sees that in him, which moves him not only to forgive you all your sins—the first introductory blessing of the covenant of grace—but with him also freely to give you all things, and make all things you meet with here to work together for your good, even afflictions and temptations among the rest. And because this is hard to believe, therefore much is said in Scripture of the Lord's kindness in afflictions: "By this your iniquity shall be purged;" and, "This shall be all the fruit to take away your sin."

You have seen, then, how the covenant offices of the Father and the Son conspire to give you, O believers, a solid foundation of reliance on the Lord in all trials; and does not the office of the Third Person in the Trinity tend to promote the same thing? It is his to take of the things of Jesus and shew

them to you; to be your Comforter and Sanctifier; to lead you into all needful truth; to bear "witness with your spirit that you are the children of God;" and to write the Divine laws on your mind and engrave them on your heart. With such a Guide, how should you not be safe! How ought you not to trust in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost! And if the adorable Three be so profusely kind as to give you eternal life, and allow you with boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus—for no good thing of yours, be it known unto you, but through the grace that is in the same Jesus alone—how shall not God be so kind as to guide you safely thither, and preserve you from all the evils of this life, support you in all dangers, and carry you through all temptations? If Joseph be so kind as to give a comfortable maintenance and settlement to his relations in Egypt, is it so great a thing if he send waggons to convey them thither? So, if God give you heaven freely, is it so great a thing if he protect you in your road all the way thither? You, then, that trust him indeed for eternal life (and if you trust not him, what else have you to look to?) how inconsistently do you act, if you trust him not amidst the light afflictions, of whatever kind, you meet with here?

Thus you see this reliance on the Lord has a rational foundation in the word of God.

And though the production of it be far above the work of human reason ("not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts"), yet in itself it is no irrational act. The means of producing and strengthening it are the views of God in Christ, which I have exhibited in a scriptural manner. In vain shall you seek to strengthen your faith by your own schemes and resolutions: it is strengthened, as I said, by looking to Jesus, who is head over all things to the church—your husband, brother, consolation, portion, prophet, priest, king, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption—and who has engaged to save you from all your enemies; so that, though they fight, they shall not prevail against you. This God was Asa's God. Provision, ample and full, was laid up in him for his deliverance from the Ethiopians, from Baasha, from any enemy. He has as good a right to trust him in the latter case as in the former: if he had done so, his deliverance had been as sweet and as sure. We can only fail of a happy issue, in all trials, through unbelief. Which brings me to illustrate this doctrine of reliance on the Lord in trouble, by an appeal to experience.

2. Let every one who knows at all, in however weak a degree, what it is to live by faith in Jesus, consider, whether there ever was any one instance of trial or difficulty, which he gave up to the Lord's management and direction,

in which he ever failed of success. 'Yes,' methinks every believer cries, 'by the little experience I have had of relying on the Lord, I know it to be the only successful way of living. Would I had more of this spirit of reliance! I should just in that proportion be more happy than I am.' Let us mention a few instances.

Upon your first conviction of sin, when the arrows of the Almighty stuck fast in you, and his hand pressed you sore; when the curse of the broken law alarmed your conscience, and bitterness and bondage galled your spirit; say, what was it that gave you the first comfort and relief, nay, the first prospect of relief? Did you find any ease or peace of mind from following the advice of your sinful companions, in endeavouring to drown your care in frivolous amusements? No; this added to your guilt: you did foolishly in hearkening to them, as Asa did in relying on the friendship of the idolatrous king of Syria. From thenceforth you had wars and conflicts multiplied in your soul. When you strove to pacify conscience by a formal round of duties, and a greater degree of religious strictness in your practice than formerly (though the doing of this last was necessary for other ends), did Mount Sinai relieve your woes, did the Law take its own curse out of your conscience? You know by experience you might as well have expected the cure of a wound given by a sword, from the point of the very sword that gave it. Alas!

you were poor worms, and the burden of the Law, as a covenant, was too heavy for you to bear. But say, What was it that did give relief; that brought an unforced smile of joy into your countenance; that enabled you to look God in the face; that eased your heart of its load of anguish, and set you at liberty to cry, "Abba, Father?" You had the view of Jesus crucified, Jesus the Friend of the miserable, in all his offices and promises, afforded you. You looked, and believed; you looked, and threw off in self-despair from yourself the attempt of becoming righteous. You relied, and the armies of sins and corruptions, that seemed ready to crush you, like the Ethiopians and Lubims, vanished before you: you were made free from sin, and became servants to God; and thus ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

And what is it at this moment that comforts and protects you against the body of sin that still dwelleth in you; what is it that keeps it down, and prevents it from depressing your soul; what, in short, counterbalances the pain it gives you; and keeps you not only from sinking under the weight, but enables you with unwearied courage to fight against it, under the hope of a perfection of victory one day to be attained? Is it not the hope you have in Jesus? Is there any other resource? What is this, then, but relying on the Lord? What is it that keeps you from being overcome by

the temptations of Satan? How often has he laboured to entangle you in the yoke of bondage, to tempt you to despair, to inject evil thoughts into your mind, and cloud all your evidences for glory! How do you overcome him? by reasoning against him merely; by resolving against him? As well might you hope to beat down a giant with straw. When you do so, you know you do foolishly; henceforth you have more of his solicitations, and your pain is prolonged: for every self-sufficient attempt to deliver yourself adds one cincture more to your chains; and the more you struggle in the mire, the deeper you sink. But when you look to Jesus, with the cry of faith, 'Draw me out of the mire, that I sink not;' and so wait upon him, bearing the yoke, till he please to remove it, you are sure to be delivered: the huge host of Ethiopian chariots and horsemen become extinct as tow, and the Lord gives you a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth, with which you beat mountains into dust, and make hills of temptations as chaff.

When you feel any plague or trouble in temporal and outward things, what do you get by impatience, unlawful ways of ridding yourself, or reliance on the arm of human reason and industry? wormwood and gall. But when this last is used in patient reliance on the Lord, he delivers you gloriously; though not perhaps in the way you could have wished,

yet in such a way as you confess was the very best for you.

Thus does the experience of believers correspond with the Scripture doctrine; and, comparing both together, may we not well say, "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him?" These glorify him as God; these honour Jesus, and use him as a Saviour indeed. How is the truth of Scripture confirmed in every age by experience! See you not, O believers, what the real way of life is? Does not the experience of every step throw stronger light about it? It is the way of humble reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ. Shall not the end be as true as all the introductory steps? Yes, surely. Go on relying on him; and when he shall appear, you shall appear with him in glory. Now you see him not; but he sees you and every one, and is continually dealing out his benefits to all who rely on him. Let experience, then, give hope. By frequent meditation keep him in your eye, in the truth and power of his offices. You must still walk by faith. The time is short: you will soon be called to walk by sight, and enjoy him without a cloud for ever.

SERMON XXVIII.

DANGER OF UNGODLY CONNECTIONS SHEWN IN THE CASE OF JEHOSHAPHAT.

2 CHRON. xix. 2.

Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord.

IT is to Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, that these words are spoken by a prophet of the Lord. It will be proper to consider a little the circumstances, as well as the character and conduct, of this prince; which may help us in illustrating, and fixing with some degree of exactness, the duty of godly persons, with respect to their behaviour toward the ungodly. I may then address a few words of application to your consciences.

The fault here found with Jehoshaphat is plainly this, that he too much encouraged, and was too fond of, the society of the ungodly. A really good man may be guilty of this; and Jehoshaphat surely was a really good man. But false professors of religion should take care not to suppose themselves like Jehoshaphat, because they imitate him only in the

worst part of his character. If you will carefully read over the xviith, xviiith, xixth, and xxth chapters of the Second Book of Chronicles, and the iiid chapter of the Second Book of Kings, you may attain a competent knowledge of this prince. It is said of him, that he walked in the first ways of his father David; that he sought the Lord God of his father; that his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord; that he took much pains to spread the knowledge of true religion among his people, and sent Levites to teach throughout his kingdom. Words can scarcely be strong enough to praise all this, considering the too common conduct of great men, who make the knowledge of God one of the last things they attend to: and God prospered him abundantly.

But there was a dead fly which marred this precious pot of ointment: he joined affinity with Ahab, the wicked king of Israel. Certainly it would have been right for Jehoshaphat to have gone so far as to prevent farther shedding of blood. To have put a stop to the destructive wars which formerly had raged between Israel and Judah, and to have kept peace with his neighbour, would have been laudable in all respects, however bad the character of that neighbour was. But he was not content with this: he joined affinity with Ahab, and married his son Jehoram to Athaliah the daughter of Ahab: he went down to visit, also, that idolatrous king, and suffered himself to be pre-

vailed on to join with him in a military expedition against the Syrians, and was in that battle in which Ahab was slain. The Lord gave him some warning here of his displeasure, by exposing him to imminent danger of his life. Being encompassed with enemies, he cried out; and the Lord helped him, and God moved them to depart from him: perceiving him to be not the king of Israel, they left him. How awkward, and out of his element, does this pious king appear in this bad company! Yet, as a real lover of the Lord, he cannot but shew his true character in Ahab's presence: "Inquire," says he, "I pray thee, at the word of the Lord to-day." Ahab is complaisant enough to send for his prophets, four hundred men, who all encourage the expedition. Such is the extreme difference between those who are led by the Spirit of God and men of this world, that even when the latter want to oblige the former by paying some attention to religion, they know not how to do it. Jehoshaphat wanted to have some religion: Ahab will give it him, and in large quantity; four hundred prophets! but not a true one among them. Jehoshaphat is not satisfied. "Is there not here," says he, "a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him?" Ahab owns there is one Micaiah: "but I hate him; for he never prophesies good unto me, but always evil." There is the same sort of hatred in all ages. The unconverted still think godliness to be

harsh, gloomy, melancholy: therefore numbers flee from the sound of it, as a plague; and those that hear it are willing to harden their hearts, that they may not submit to it. It is not possible to be faithful and agreeable to you, O unconverted men, at the same time. You need a Divine change: you wish to continue as you are: you must undergo the pain of conversion, if ever you be saved. Jehoshaphat shews himself in a beautiful light by answering, "Let not the king say so."

There seems in all this business something like an attempt to mix together things that cannot incorporate. The world would often wish godly men to be as they are, and to have intimacies kept up between them, that so the distinction between them might be lost; but the effect of this would be, that godliness itself would be lost if this prevailed. It is the will of God that his people should be a distinct and separate people; that others may take notice and learn from them, and that God may be glorified, and his truth and wisdom be seen and honoured among men. At the last day the distinction will be complete, final, and everlasting. As different as heaven is from hell, as distinct as the sound, "Come, ye blessed," is from "Depart, ye cursed," such is the real difference of character between the godly and ungodly. How wrong, then, to think of their being united!

Ahab carries his complaisance so far as to send

for Micaiah, just in the same spirit as a profane person, who is under an obligation to a godly man, consents occasionally to hear the word of God. Micaiah's prophecy is well known. Is it not wonderful that Jehoshaphat should still choose to venture with Ahab? But he had lost, in this instance, the true courage of a child of God, by keeping bad company. And if real friends of God consider what disadvantages they expose themselves to by needlessly giving way to wicked men, and how stripped they are of their proper arms, they would be more wary. It is impossible that Jehoshaphat can be in a very comfortable state of mind, when going with a wicked king on an expedition in which he knows, from the word of God, his companion must suffer; for, however Ahab, an unbeliever, may make light of the Divine declaration, Jehoshaphat cannot. Yet we have seen the goodness of God, in giving him warning, exposing him to sore danger, and yet preserving him. He returns home in peace; and Jehu the seer goes out to meet him. The Lord prepares for him, on his return, a prophetic rebuke, even that of the text: "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?" He does not mean that Jehoshaphat should hate the persons of the wicked, but he should not love them with a love of complacency. We may, and should, pity, and pray for, and mourn over, the wicked; but if we shew ourselves satisfied with them,

and make them our choicest intimates, so as to help them in their schemes and prospects, we act unfaithfully to the Lord; we do not sufficiently shew the difference between the Spirit of God and of this world; we give occasion to the wicked to suppose that godliness is not that good and necessary thing which it is. Oh what a difference between loving and hating the Lord! Yet ungodly men hate the true God; and can we express satisfaction in them and their ways, and not grieve the Spirit of the Lord?—"Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord." The Lord was displeased with Jehoshaphat, and chastised him with temporal punishments; in what way and manner we may see by and bye. Yet the prophet owns the good things which were in the king; and he goes on, we find, still instructing his people in the ways of God, and promoting whatever was excellent in his kingdom.

We find him afterwards, in the xxth chapter, exhibiting another instance of faith in God, and experiencing a great deliverance. Yet the same evil, of too much intimacy with the wicked, attends him. He joined himself with Ahaziah, king of Israel, who did very wickedly—the son of wicked Ahab. He entered into partnership with him in the trade for the gold of Ophir. A prophet was commissioned to shew him the Lord's displeasure, by threatening him with the ruin of the vessels;

and it came to pass. This made an impression on his spirit: on Ahaziah's entreating him to make a second joint attempt, Jehoshaphat refused. Still, we again find him united with Jehoram, the brother and successor of Ahaziah, in a military expedition, and they are brought into great danger. Here Jehoshaphat again entreats his wicked partner to call in a prophet of the Lord, and Elisha is sent for. Jehoshaphat said, "The word of the Lord is with him;" for he knew who were right and who were wrong, amidst all the criminal compliances which he made. The prophet treats the king of Israel with the plain severity which he deserved, and assures him, he would not look toward him, nor see him, were it not that he regarded the presence of Jehoshaphat; and God graciously delivered them both from their danger, on Jehoshaphat's account.

The subject has led me, you see, to dwell more on the evils of this good king than on his excellencies. Alas! were it not for the blood of Christ, no soul would see God. Men little know themselves who would have acceptance with God placed on any other footing. I doubt not but Jehoshaphat was ready with his dying breath to present his supplications, not for his righteousness, but for God's great mercies. This humble spirit of looking for salvation from grace, and renouncing our works entirely in the point, makes a capital difference between a good and a wicked man. Jehosha-

phat is so far from having any thing of his own to depend on, that God is obliged, as it were, to take much pains with him, and to exercise much patience with him, to keep him from ruining himself. And yet there is a real difference of character between a godly and an ungodly person; though not such as gives the former the least room to boast. All who get to heaven shall sing, "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." Jehoshaphat arrived there at last, and by grace was pardoned all his sins, and had his besetting sin gradually subdued; but it was scourged most awfully in his family after he left this world.

See the folly of good men's uniting themselves to the wicked. Jehoshaphat marries his son, Jehoram, to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab. Alas! men who fear God will often find it more than they can do to restrain their children from evil, even with the best precepts and the best example; but if they connect their children by marriage, for the sake of worldly convenience, with wicked families, they will find them more prone to imitate those into whose society they introduce them, than to follow the godly example of their parents. Jehoram remembers none of his good father's precepts but one, the worst of them, to cultivate the friendship of Ahab's family. He no sooner comes to the throne than he lives as if he had the blood of Ahab, not of

Jehoshaphat, in him: he murders all his brethren, and establishes idolatry! After his death, his wife, Athaliah, cuts off all the seed royal, and usurps the kingdom herself; and had not Providence taken particular care of a single infant, the whole house of David had perished by her hands.—But I must not enlarge: the lover of Scripture history may read these things for himself. Let, only, men who love the Lord take care not to be seduced by any worldly prospects to unite their children with the wicked; for a curse on their house may be reasonably expected as the consequence.

And it will not now be difficult, with the case of Jehoshaphat in our eye, in the second place, to state the duty of godly persons,—they should not help the ungodly, they should not love them that hate the Lord. Many questions, of a captious and cavilling nature, may be asked here; and persons whose hearts are too much disposed to love the world, will be ready to invent a thousand excuses and evasions for cultivating the intimacy of wicked men. We cannot, it is true, be entirely without some acquaintance with the wicked: the duty of our calling, and the voice of Providence itself, may lead us at times into their company: otherwise, as St. Paul says, we must needs go out of the world. Nor, when we are in their company, ought we to study or affect a sullen silence, and to force them, whether they will

or not, to talk with us about the things of God, by pressing them on their minds unseasonably. Nor should we think ourselves bound never to be with them without making a point of rebuking them for sin. Nor should we violate the rules of civility and courtesy, which are due to all mankind. Much less should we provoke them by unkind behaviour; and we ought to convince them that we love their persons, while we cannot approve their principles; and we should, when we shew them their evil condition, always treat them with compassion, never with contempt. Finally, we should strive to live peaceably with them, as well as with all men, and be ready to do them good offices by every method in our power. But, on the other side, we must not love them in the sense the text mentions—that is, we must not love them with the love of complacency. Real Christians should not be fond of their society, nor enter into it needlessly. And if men really love the Lord, and hate wickedness, they will not find pleasure in it. If I love any person sincerely, can I be fond of cultivating the acquaintance of those who hate him? And in truth, what business has Jehoshaphat with Ahab's society? In things of the greatest moment they cannot agree at all: Jehoshaphat is crossed in the article of religion continually by him, and he has only an opportunity of giving him a slight rebuke. The company of ungodly men deadens the

soul; it grieves and saddens the spirit. It must give pain to a godly person to hear his Maker's name blasphemed, and the best things in the world derided or neglected. And how is it possible for such intimacies to be preserved and cherished with delight, without doing great harm to the soul? Surely, if you love the Lord, you cannot follow your wicked companions in the vanities and fashions and pleasures of the world. And let me ask any of you, who want to ease your consciences in still keeping up such hurtful connections, Do you rebuke these friends of yours for their sinful practices? Do you see that they are better in their souls by your acquaintance? Do they love your society because you are useful to them in their souls? Does it appear that they love to hear any thing good from you, and that through you they are in any respect amending themselves? If so, I pray you go on with their acquaintance; and the Lord prosper it abundantly, especially if you find that this is the great reason you have for cultivating it. But is it not quite otherwise? These men you are fond of, hate the Lord, and will not give you an opportunity of speaking a word for Jesus Christ; and would think you very rude were you ever seriously to introduce religion into their company, and would be affronted, and have no patience with you. What are we then to think? If there is a probability of doing them good, it is a

good reason why you should be often with them: for charity is the rule of rules, and bears down all objections; nor is it possible to lay down exact rules for all cases; yet men will not far err who love the Lord, and are looking to him for guidance continually. But ask yourselves further, what is your motive for being fond of such company. Is it not the love of gain; or does it not feed your pride, because they are rich or genteel people; or is it that you gratify your fondness for news and gossipping? My brethren, examine. These are bad motives. No wonder your soul is in a lean state, if you proceed thus. And if you have a family, learn, from the terrible curse which came on Jehoshaphat's house, not to be fond of introducing your children among great, or rich, or high people, to gratify your covetousness and their vanity. To be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers" is terrible in all things, most of all in marriage. And learn from the Lord's punishing Jehoshaphat's trading connections with Ahaziah, to avoid as much as possible such snares. Alas! it is the evil of places of commerce, of modern times in general, and of too many professors of godliness, to stick at no danger whatever, if there be only a prospect of obtaining money. Harm to the soul is the last thing thought of. It was not so with primitive Christians. I have said it, and am more and more convinced of it, when I compare the past times with the

present, that in this point (I do not say it is so in all other points), but in this, of heavenly mindedness and making light of this world, the Christians of the first ages far exceed those of our times; insomuch that one of the early fathers, giving a short account who Christians were, says, They were a people who made a light account of this life, and gave themselves up to contemplate the mystery of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. That precious doctrine of the Trinity, you see, including the covenant of grace, and the whole of vital godliness, was their delight, and they were nourished by it in their souls; and at the same time (how beautiful!) they made light account of this life. But can it be said of us in general who profess godliness, that we thus contemplate Divine things, and thus are easy in our thoughts and cares about this life? I wish it could. But while we help the ungodly, and love those that hate the Lord; seeking to please them; hiding our religion, as it were, from them, and afraid to shew it; we must make ourselves more and more worldly.

By this time I think you may see in general what a Christian's duty is with respect to the wicked. He should remember, that it is his duty to honour God and his true religion in the world. He should let all men see that he is not ashamed of it, and that he places all his happiness in it. Hence he will not needlessly cultivate the society of the wicked; much less

will he, to gratify them, sin against God. By such a conduct the light of true religion is kept up in the world; the true honour and character of God is supported; Christ's people are preserved a distinct, peculiar people; the world has an opportunity to know what the Gospel is, in a visible way, by the life and example of those who profess its doctrines. But when Jehoshaphat joins with Ahab, and those who love the Lord help those who hate him, and sin is not rebuked; coalitions of the most monstrous kind take place, like those between the sons of God and the daughters of men, which had so great a hand in bringing on the general wickedness that caused the Flood; finally, the principles of true religion are lost and confounded, and a sceptical sort of false charity, which mixes things quite opposite, prevails, issuing in the want of all conscience toward God, and in practical atheism.

I close this subject with a word of advice to three sorts of persons.

First. You who halt between two opinions—who are religious with the religious, and worldly with the worldly; whose consciences are so far wrought on, that you see something of the beauty of godliness, but who love not to bear the cross of Christ—consider, I beseech you: many have done as you do, and their latter end is worse than their beginning. It is bad ground on which you stand: I fear many have sunk into hell who have walked on it. You

live under the Gospel, and you profess it, at least to such a degree that you expect to be treated as those who love Christianity; but now count the cost, and be honest. There are two sorts of persons in the world,—those who love Christ, and those who hate him. There is a perfect contrariety here. You must either be the one or the other: you cannot mix them. As soon as Christ had given the word of the Gospel to his disciples, he says, "The world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." And it has always been so, and must be so. They love opposite things. Christ's people are humble, loathe themselves for sin, fight against their sinful nature, dread sin as the worst of all evils: The world loves sin, makes a mock of it, and is proud of its own righteousness at the same time. Christ's people love their Master, their Husband, their Shepherd, their Saviour, their High Priest and Prince; they have just ideas of Christ in all these lights, and they have communion with him in all these respects; and through him alone they expect remission of sins, and are made partakers of the kingdom of heaven: The world does not regard Christ, unless for a little shew, or in the way of decent ceremony; his love they feel not, and inwardly scorn it. Christ's people know the need of what he has told them, "Ye must be born again;" and they reverently regard the work of the

Holy Spirit, which the world despises. Christ's people love God: the world calls the love of God enthusiasm. Real Christians prize the next life, and are living for it; and cultivate patience, meekness, charity, and all the dispositions which belong to the heavenly kingdom; The world minds the things of the world, and is given up to selfishness and pride. Now, ye who trim between two sorts of people, choose which you will be joined to wholly. If you will follow Christ, do it as honest men, openly, fully, frankly: forsake the foolish, and live: give up the vain customs and fashions of the world; and do not be ashamed to become Christians, and to own Christians, and to rebuke sin, and to follow the Lord fully. You may then expect the Lord will bless you, and in happy experience give you to know the comforts of his religion here, and the happiness of it hereafter. But if you will go on still in that half-Christian, doubtful way, you may think to bring Christians and worldly people together; but you yourselves will be led away by the world, and will one day know, that not charity, but selfishness, prevailed in your souls.

Secondly. And, real Christians, if any of us (and who does not see that this is the case with too many?), are hurt in our souls by worldly and dangerous compliances, let us seek to reform what is amiss. Even if the evil have gone no further than this, that

we follow the ungodly too much, for the sake of amusement, and for the indulgence of a curious or talkative spirit, yet it dries up the spring of Divine comfort in the soul. Brethren, who is He that stands at the door and knocks? who promises to come into those who open, and they shall have delightful communion with him in their souls? Pray in secret, and commune with your own hearts, and be still, till He fulfil his words, and give you communion with himself. If you have known it formerly in your souls, you did not want the world to make you happy; and if you recover the light of his countenance, and walk in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, in a thriving way, you will not want the society of the wicked to cheer you. Consider who Christ is, and what mansions he has for you, and what he had done for you, and what he expects of you, and you will not fail to do justice to the duty of the text.

Lastly. Are the ungodly described in the text as those who "hate the Lord?" What a dreadful character! Are there any here? Yes: all unconverted men hate the Lord. You who through this whole discourse felt a dislike to the whole subject of loving God, you hate the Lord; and your hatred is shewn by your dislike of his precepts and ways. But kiss the Son; even Jesus—his Son, whom he sent to save you—lest you perish, if his wrath be kindled, yea, but a little.

SERMON XXIX.

TRANSIENT RELIGION EXEMPLIFIED IN JOASH.

2 CHRON. xxiv. 2.

And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest—

—And why no longer, Joash? To do what is "right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest"—or, as it is expressed in the parallel place in the Second of Kings, all the "days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed" thee—affords but too plain a suspicion that it was reverence for Jehoiada, thy teacher, guardian, benefactor, and instructor, and not reverence for the Lord God, which principled thy obedience. Thy preceptor is gone, and thou forsakest the Lord, and even provest thy enmity against him. A true love of God, and a hearty reverence of his majesty, is not so easily lost: it depends not on such circumstances as human connections: it is a living principle, and remains unshaken by the removal of human props, being sustained from above; and is itself that living water

which whoever drinketh shall find to be in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life.

As there is something awful indeed, yet instructive, in the character and conduct of this Joash, I shall, 1st, lay open to you, very briefly, his story; and, 2dly, draw some useful inferences from it; concluding with an address to the consciences of those who may seem most concerned in the subject. And, oh! be with us here also, O precious Comforter and Guide of the church of Christ! and we shall find this field of instruction salutary and fruitful to our souls.

1. This Joash was the son of that Ahaziah king of Judah, who, together with Jehoram king of Israel, some Scripture readers among you may remember, was slain by Jehu the son of Nimshi. That active warrior destroyed also a number of his kindred, forty-two men; and by this, and some other tragical events, the royal line of David was threatened with the danger of total extinction. He who in history, or in his own experience or observation, has watched the motions and ways of Providence, may observe to what extreme hazard the Lord puts his own truth and promises, and yet always takes care of them, even in the severest crisis of danger. So it was here. "David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of Israel," was the Divine word sublimely fulfilled in the ever-blessed reign of Jesus the Son of David.

But had all David's posterity been previously cut off, what then? It was not possible it should be so. Heaven and earth should sooner pass, than God fail of his promise. But mark the danger of this royal house. Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, is the daughter of Ahab; and her pride, idolatry, and cruelty are beyond all description. She, hearing of her son's death, conceives the design of reigning herself, and to this end destroys all the seed royal of the house of Judah (ch. xxii.) But Jehoshabeath, who was the sister of the late king Ahaziah, stole an infant of one year old (this same Joash, whose character my text gives us): she stole him from among the king's sons that were slain, and put him and his nurse in a bed-chamber. Thus his aunt preserved him from the horrid fury of his grandmother; and six years was he hid in the house of God, during which time Athaliah reigned over the land.

But the same Providence which watched over Joash's helpless infancy, provided him also an able benefactor and instructor in Jehoiada the priest, a venerable and truly glorious character, the husband of Joash's aunt, who saved his life. After six years, Jehoiada executed a plan to restore him to the house of David, and to take vengeance on wicked Athaliah; the story of which you may see at large in the xxiiid chapter. After Athaliah's death, Jehoiada takes care, while he fixes

Joash on the throne, to destroy idolatry, and to restore the worship, and, as far as lay in man, the true faith, of the God of Israel. He instructs Joash's tender mind, and, so far as man can do it (and let not any one be discouraged from the pious work of educating youth in the fear of God, though the event may turn out ill, as in Joash's case), he took care to make Joash a godly person: and so great were the ties of gratitude, and, as it were, filial reverence, which bound the young king to his benefactor, that all the days of Jehoiada he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. He stuck close to the pure worship of God: he was even zealous in it. One instance of his zeal is described at some length,—his pains to repair the breaches of the house of the Lord. And so possible is it, sometimes, for a mere formalist in religion to surpass even a truly godly man in some instances of outward conduct, that he even exceeds in zeal, in this respect, his venerable and holy benefactor Jehoiada, and reproves him for his negligence: "Why hast thou not required of the Levites to bring in out of Judah and out of Jerusalem the collection?"

This prince repaired the Lord's house, then, with much zeal and success. But, behold! Jehoiada dies, an hundred and thirty years old: his character is, "he had done good in Israel, both toward God and toward his house." An accursed leaning in secret to ido-

latry still prevailed among the princes of Judah. You may say, In them it was the effect of former habits. It could not be so in Joash: good Jehoiada had surely bred him up from an infant in detestation of idolatry. But natural corruption, derived from original, will, unless converting grace prevent, be too strong even for all the force of good habits and the best education. The princes of Judah, who durst not think of it while Jehoiada lived, now made obeisance to the king, and he hearkened to them: they allured him into idolatry, and he fell into the snare: they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served groves and idols. The Lord sent prophets to bring them again to the Lord, and they testified against them; but they would not give ear. The Spirit of God came particularly on Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, who expostulated with them for their sins. Can you think it? This very Joash orders Zechariah, the son of venerable Jehoiada his benefactor, to be stoned to death, and more besides of his family, as appears from the close of the chapter! And Zechariah, dying, said, "The Lord look upon it, and require it." This might be, and most probably was, said in the spirit of prophecy; but, as a pattern for our imitation, Stephen's behaviour is far preferable: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Dreadful punishments follow Joash, in the destruction of a great host by a handful of Syrians. Great

diseases, and at last a violent death by two of his own servants, finish, in this world, very awfully, the dismal story of a man who had begun so hopefully in the ways of God.

2. I have now, secondly, some useful inferences to draw from the story of Joash.

(1.) See we hence the deceitfulness of the heart of man! Did Joash suspect, think you, while he followed the Lord's ways so zealously, and his heart had such gratitude and reverence for Jehoiada his benefactor and tutor, that even at that very time his spirit was not sincere with God? Most probably not: he would not have believed any one who should have told him what wickedness he was capable of,—even the murder of his benefactor's son, and the support of idolatry! Numbers cry out against the wickedness of others, even in those very things which they themselves, reduced to the same circumstances, fall into. Here, then, let us learn, not only the necessity of conversion, but also the danger of fancying ourselves converted when we are not. Outward duties and services of religion, even attended with great zeal, very often are no sure proof at all. This we have seen in Joash. Ah! brethren, we should know also an inward work of grace on our hearts. Without this, which too many deride as fancy, our outward duties, even though beneficial to human society, are no more than dead works. Nor, on the other hand, are any feelings of heart to be looked on

as tests of godliness, if they produce not correspondent fruits of righteousness. The inward and the outward work of religion must go together, in order to prove either sincere. Joash had outward religion, but no inward. Gratitude to Jehoiada, his patron, would carry him a great way in duty; and the love of praise might give him a false pleasure in religion. But neither the best education, nor the most amazing providences, do, properly speaking, change the heart. It may be much affected with temporal mercies received from God, such as those which Joash had experienced: gratitude to God and man, with respect to worldly things, may move it much; and yet the enmity of human nature may silently remain at bottom for years, and burst out at length in real action and bitter fruitfulness, when a favourable opportunity occurs. A Divine energy alone can change the heart: and those who know what the change means, know that it is of God, and that of themselves they are at perfect enmity against God.

The ignorance of many, with respect to their own hearts, is very pitiable. To know that we are sincere toward God, is one of the rarest and most difficult attainments in religion. Truly, holy men find it so; and when no one else suspects them of insincerity, they often dare not conclude themselves sincere, they know so much of their selfishness and hypocrisy by nature. On the other hand, proud, self-con-

ceited men, who are walking careless, in sin, in neglect of God and his word, will often be quite assured that they are sincere and well-meaning. They allow they are wrong in such and such things; but as to insincerity in religion, they never fancy themselves capable of it. When will you begin to suspect yourselves? One is a drunkard; another curses and swears, or is guilty of lewdness, or too fond of the world; yet all have good hearts! Shame on such good hearts! hearts fit for Satan's company; unsound, as their fruits testify. Oh, begin at length to see that your hearts are naught: we have seen that they may be so even under a long sustained shew of religion, as was the case with Joash; how much more with you, who live without religious care altogether, and in the indulgence of vice? "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out;" and assure yourselves at present you have no sincerity. What makes you think yourselves sincere? your heart! He that trusts it, says Solomon, is a fool.

(2.) I would observe hence, also, the excellency of Divine love. This is the thing that evidences sincerity. Get the love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost given to you; view the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge; behold in this glass the glory of the Lord: and when you are once warmed, and enlivened, and transformed by it, learning hence to love God and your neighbour, you

will feel in religion such a spirit as Jehoiada had, and such as Joash never tasted,—the spirit of love, brethren! Ah! what avails all knowledge, and all works too, without it! By this it is that the heart is delighted with God, and walks with him as a child with a Father. In this spirit, what you do is acceptable to God: without it, nothing is. The pleasures of Joash in religion, I can conceive what they were,—the result of self-righteous pride, vain glory, and gratitude for temporal mercies. But the knowledge of God as Love, a delight in him as such, and an affectionate regard for him as his Father and his Portion, he had not. If he had possessed this, he would have stuck by him, not only during the flaming heat of youthful zeal and while Jehoiada was alive, but also under any circumstances, and in any situation; for love "endureth all things."

I fear we are far too negligent of the feeling of the love of God in our hearts. We must not be shy of this, because the world is pleased to call it enthusiasm, and because wicked men have made a bad use of the pretence of it. What shall we attend to at all, if we be hindered because some have abused it? Name any thing that has not been made an ill use of. Trust not, then, to your sincerity without proof. Remember how Joash, as high a professor as you, fell into idolatry and persecution. Get the Spirit of God to witness with your spirit that you are the children of

God, and then you have an evidence worth attending to; and perhaps one word, "love," is the best description of it. Divine love will prove itself by its own light. You shall, when possessed of it in any measure, know in God's way and time that he is with you of a truth. And though you can as soon make a world as beget one spark of love in your hearts, it is yet your duty to strive earnestly, in the use of those means which God has appointed.

Beware of one thing particularly—of thinking that you have the love of God when you have not. How came you by it? You certainly were not born with it. We come into the world, not only void of the love of God, but with hearts at perfect enmity with him. When did you begin to feel this? How were you changed? What effect had God's love in Christ on you? Does God appear now lovely to you? Would you follow his ways for ever, for pure love, even setting aside the fear of hell? No man is fit for heaven who has not some real measure of these things. And as this love is from heaven, and you have it not by nature, do not say you have it when you have it not, because that may deceive you to your ruin; but seek for it from above, through Christ, in the Gospel way, that you may find it before you die.

(3.) Joash's story teaches us, also, the power of natural conscience, that candle of the Lord, which is in every man's heart. We have seen a man void of the pure love of God as any

other, yet by the awe of goodness, and by the natural ascendant which it has over vice, reverently follow for years the ways of piety, which he did not purely love. What an effect has the character of Jehoiada! it can do any thing, but change the heart. How great that influence was, we see by the dismal change for the worse which followed his death. Since goodness has this commanding ascendant, even in this wretched world, and the voice of conscience even in the worst bears witness for it, it is a pleasing anticipation of the triumphs of it hereafter, and a testimony from God what side he is of.

Perhaps some may see here, something also of the artifice of Satan. That subtle enemy cannot withstand the blaze of true goodness in Jehoiada. Did he not wish, think you, to bring Joash into idolatry long before he effected it? But the power of conscience and gratitude, testifying for Jehoiada, leaves Satan no hope as yet to make Joash an open offender. He is content to keep him his own at heart, for the present; and when favourable conjunctures arise, as at old Jehoiada's death, then to push on the young hypocrite, but self-deceived hypocrite, to open and foul rebellion. This may be one of Satan's common devices: to do what mischief he can for the present, and wait patiently on us for years, till an opportunity occur of his doing more. Oh how watchful in prayer should Christians

be against his snares, and how suspicious of his wiles and devices!

(4.) The propensity of man to idolatry, and the sameness of the Old-Testament idolatry with that of more modern times in spirit and in substance, have been shewn on a former occasion, from the Book of Judges [in the sermons on Gideon]. I would just observe here, from the dismal propensity which Joash, his princes, and his people, shewed to groves and idols, how deeply fallen is man, and how ready is he to start aside from the living God at every opportunity. We are called on to come to Jehovah, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; to glorify him with the full dependence of our souls; to put our whole trust in Him, as undone sinners; to accept of his gift of righteousness in Jesus, and praise him for it; and serve him with love to eternity. This is our happiness. But Satan has ever some accursed idol to set up, to draw us from this confidence in God. Our humanity and our reason—excellent things both, and precious gifts of God, when rightly used, they both are; but the present age surely makes idols of them both. Ask many, perhaps in this congregation, what they trust to for their salvation: if they spoke honestly, they might say—not the blood of Jesus, and the mere grace of God, but—'Our humanity to the distressed!' Ask them, how they come to understand the Scriptures aright: they might say, 'By our reason!'

not by the Holy Ghost, as every true Christian must say. And thus, though a little honour, in words, be given to God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, their real honour—which consists in trust and dependence of heart, and most of all in the time of trouble—their real honour is set aside. Nor are Joash's groves and idols more real abominations of idolatry in the sight of God, than is the self-righteousness at this day, even of those who keep up forms of Christian worship in the midst of it.

(5.) I have only to add another inference, which respects the goodness of God in giving warning before he punishes. He might in his justice have cut off Joash in his sins, when he turned to idolatry; but he sent prophets, and gave him earnest and friendly warning. This is the Lord's way; and oh that we may profit by it, accounting "that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation!" Joash's severe punishments, which we read of in the story we have reviewed, are so many awful preludes of the punishments which await sinners hereafter.

But I hasten to close, with a few words of application to persons more particularly concerned in the subject; which seem to me to be, first, those in more advanced life, who have not profited by a good education and early means of grace; and, in the second place, younger persons, who at present enjoy and prize those advantages.

First. To begin with the former: How is it with you, fellow-creatures? You were wont in younger days to have some pleasure in religion. When your consciences were more tender, and you were yet novices in the world, you durst not lie and deceive, and overreach in trade, as you do now. Poor benefit has the knowledge of the world given you, if you have gained thereby a stupidity of conscience! Recollect, if now you are at enmity with the people and ways of God, though you had been brought up in them, that you must have sinned dreadfully against light and knowledge. Retire inward, and consider whether, with all the supposed advantages you have gotten over the prejudices of education, you are not really more and more senseless of God and duty; less ashamed of sin; less concerned for eternity; more selfish and insincere in your dealings; and more fond of the world, than formerly. If this be growth in wisdom, may I be content to be a fool. Oh, consider that you have fooled away the precious advantages of early means of grace; that you are on the eve of dreadful punishments, such as fell on Joash; and therefore repent speedily, and remember what light you were early favoured with; for hell to you will be hell indeed.

A word, lastly, to young persons in this audience who have the benefit of godly education, and prize it in any measure.—Oh read and consider well the character and case of Joash!

Do not be proud or confident of any present attainments. It is pleasing to see, indeed, the signs of grace in young hearts; but I would seldom place much dependance on them. Nothing is more common than for them all to die away in a little time. Beware, O young persons, particularly, of the love of praise. Young as you are, insincerity is natural to you: it is quite natural for you to have a false sort of pleasure in religion, loving the praise of pious friends, who are delighted to see any marks of grace in you. They will be wise not to feed you with praise for your religious attainments. Oh consider, young persons, how well Joash acted, and how he became at last an idolater and persecutor! God forbid I should discourage; only be cautious, lest it be your lot to fall with him. Persevere in private prayer, if you mean to succeed. Divine strength can keep you from falling.

SERMON XXX.

THE ZEAL OF HEZEKIAH AGAINST FALSE RELIGION.

2 KINGS xviii. 4, 5.

And brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it; and he called it Nehushtan. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel.

THE character and conduct of Hezekiah, king of Judah, are singularly memorable in sacred story. He had no sooner received the succession of the kingdom, which was left to him in a most weak, idolatrous, and miserable state, from his wicked father Ahaz, than he set about a godly reformation. He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves. He knew very well that there was no such thing as serving God and mammon. The false gods, and every idolatrous and self-righteous refuge, must be forsaken, despised, and set at nought, or he could never worship the God of Israel. How he executed this noble plan; what pains he took with the people to restore them to the simple faith and worship of the God of Israel, and to cleanse them from

idolatry; and with what sincerity in his own person he trusted in a covenant God alone, when all help of all other kinds was taken from him; and how the Lord was with him, and prospered him in his righteous confidence; he who chooses, and has a spiritual discernment, may read with pleasure in the narrative of his reign, here, in the Second Book of Kings, and also in the xxixth and two following chapters of the Second Book of Chronicles.

Where God gives strong faith, he tries and exercises it with temptation, that his arm may appear; and that the believer, coming unhurt out of the fire, may be a pattern for the encouragement of others to put their trust in him. This was eminently the case with this godly prince, who, after a most glorious reformation, is yet visited with a terrible and dangerous war from the proud Sennacherib, and is reduced to the lowest scenes of distress. Yet he trusts still; and the destroying angel, who in one night made such havock of Sennacherib's army, explains the event. Surely it may be said of Hezekiah, that he trusted indeed in the Lord God of Israel. But it is not my design to enlarge on his character in general: great and blessed as it was, still, not he, but the grace of God in him, did the great things. That I may hasten, therefore, to the particular subject I have before me, I shall confine my attention to the points mentioned in the text.

"He brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it."—This was a very ancient monument among the Israelites: the use of it was well known; the people, bitten by living serpents, were cured only by looking at the brasen serpent erected on a pole! "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." So our Lord teaches us to make use of the story. By the look of faith at Christ crucified, the soul that is wearied and burdened with sin is spiritually healed, and finds peace. Yet, what is there, however useful and venerable, which the depravity of man will not abuse? It seems the brasen serpent had been preserved for ages, as a monument of the Lord's goodness to his people; and the very sight of it would, from time to time, remind believers, who looked for the Saviour that was to come, how to put their trust in God through him. But the perverseness of man defeated this godly use of the serpent: the Israelites, in their rage for idolatry, burnt incense to it. Instead of being assisted by it to direct their faith to God their Saviour, they made of it an engine of idolatry, which turned away their hearts from the living God: they trusted in it, and in their worship which they paid to it, and not in the living God. For

this reason this good prince brake it in pieces, that he might remove the occasion of their idolatry. He teaches us, that those things which, though innocent and even useful in themselves, yet by long custom been made an occasion of sin, should often be given up by us altogether, because we are ever likely to receive harm, and not benefit, from them. And, to take away their superstitious reverence for it, "he called it Nehushtan"—that is, *a piece of brass*. He called it, what it was in itself, a piece of brass, and no more—it was in itself nothing sacred or venerable.

It was in the same spirit that our reformers depreciated various superstitious customs and practices of Popery: and for this they were called profane and ungodly men. For the minds of carnal persons, by mere habits of education, contract a dangerous reverence for many things of human invention, which they regard far more than the word of God; and whoever attempts to tear these idols from them, seems to them an enemy of religion.

But Hezekiah meant to draw his subjects from false to true religion; yet his destruction of so many false objects of worship may seem to have fixed on him the stigma of profaneness, in the eyes of idolaters, as one may judge from a sentence of Rabshakeh's proud speech: "If ye say, We trust in the Lord our God, is not that he whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away?"

Great indeed must that light and wisdom be from above, which enables a man who truly fears God, and is afraid of offending him above all things, yet to despise and trample on all that false worship and religion for which, from long use, his conscience has acquired a superstitious reverence; and this, too, when he is sure to be censured for it by all around him. It was this strong light which enabled Luther to despise the monastic fopperies of Rome, to which he had been long addicted; for he, like Hezekiah, "trusted in the Lord God of Israel." There rests the spirit of a true believer: he renounces all wisdom, righteousness, and worship, but that of God himself, which he has revealed and appointed. There he rests, and loves his God, and follows and enjoys true religion. And all good men, lived they before Christ or since, it matters not, have ever been careful to trust in God alone, through the Mediator; and to worship him only, in faith, hope, and love; not in human inventions, but in spirit and in truth.

I shall now, in the sequel, speak to formal worshippers, who, like those who burnt incense to the brasen serpent, do regularly attend with their bodies to some religious duties, but with no sincere trust in the Lord God of Israel, and yet expect, falsely expect, to be saved by this practice. I shall, 1st, point out, briefly, what sort of persons I mean, that their consciences may feel our subject;

and, 2dly, endeavour to treat them as Hezekiah did their predecessors in idolatry, by breaking their brasen serpent in pieces, and calling it Nehushtan—I mean, by shewing them the emptiness of the things they trust in—that they may learn true religion, which will save their souls, in trusting to the Lord God of Israel.

1. *Formal worshippers,* I call the persons I am to address.—Had they been brought up Dissenters, they would have been noted for their strong attachment to the forms and modes of worship used among Dissenters, who, I doubt not, have among them worshippers of the same sort and spirit. It is not the Church of England that should be blamed, as producing this spirit; it is in human nature, depraved by sin and the fall, and full of ignorance and pride. In all Christian denominations the same formality may be seen. Many are constant at church and sacrament: their behaviour is decent, and apparently devout: they are exact in certain customs, of no sort of consequence, which they have been used to follow; and their consciences would hurt them more if they were to break through those customs, than they would for real and known sins. Many of them repeat prayers—it is to be be feared, with no meaning at all: so much drudgery of prayer they must go through—or if they have any earnestness at times, or in some parts of the service, they are vastly

pleased with themselves for it, and think how much better men they are than those who do not attend these duties as they do. They feel nothing of the real character and real goodness of God; they have no brokenness of heart for sin; they do not get any heavenly affections at all by these their religious services. Yet in these, alas! many trust as their righteousness: they expect that this practice will carry them to heaven; it is put in the room of Christ. Now examine yourselves. For years you have proceeded in this way, always pleased with yourselves for your religion. But look at your knowledge and your practice. Do you appear to know any more of godliness than others, who do not attend these things at all? Take the Prayer-book from you, and your religion is gone. You scarcely ever think of praying at other than your set times: particularly, the art of praying without ceasing, the having a praying frame of spirit, which disposes a man to lift up his heart to God even in the midst of business, you are strangers to. Your conversation is ever vain, proud, frothy, and worldly: your tempers are not at all sweetened by your religion: your covetousness is as strong as ever; and no wonder, since you purchase a kind of licence for your love of the world by this empty form of religion.

It must be allowed, that if men for many years have gone on in this sort of religion, and yet have no more love of God than at first, no

more humility of soul, no more knowledge and thankful regard to Jesus Christ, are just as froward in temper, as covetous in spirit, and as mean and worldly in all their proceedings as ever; and no one could ever find they have the savour of religion when they are taken out of their forms; it must be allowed that they deceive themselves with a vain shew. Religion makes no part of their temper and spirit. It is like their clothes, which they can put on and off at pleasure. It is a mechanical affair: it reaches not heaven, and it will never carry them thither.

I think enough has been said to shew what sort of people I mean, and whose conduct I compare to that of Israel, who burnt incense to the brasen serpent. I compassionate their case. They must be brought off from their vain confidence, or they cannot be saved, because it keeps them from the love of God and true religion. It is painful to them to be divorced from the flattering hopes they indulge; but I beseech them not to be angry with me, who surely would not willingly offend them, merely because I attempt to lead them out of the wrong into the right spirit of religion.

But so full of danger, and so delicate, is this subject, that I fear other sort of persons may get harm to their souls while I speak to the formalist. A word of caution, then, to two sorts of persons.

First, Let *careless persons*, who worship God in no way, who cannot behave decently in this house when they come into it, take care that they rejoice not over the formalist. He is wrong—you will see that with pleasure—but so are you also; and it is more easy to shew you to be wrong than him. You have no religion: you wear Satan's livery openly. Repent, and humble yourselves before God, lest you perish.

Secondly, *Sincere worshippers* of God and his Christ, have need to take care of themselves here also. Because formalists make too much ado with forms, do not imagine that you, while you learn to trust in God alone, may indulge a slovenly frame of body and mind in public worship. Because they make a wrong use of public worship, do not you be careless in it. Attend with reverence to every part of the Liturgy: take care of your eyes, lest they wander: use your books and your lips with propriety: and, above all, affect your hearts with the godly sentiments of the prayers. The fault is not in them, but in the formalists themselves, that they make idols of them. If *they* repeat prayers without meaning, do *you* repeat them, my brethren, with meaning and affection; and if you look to the Lord seriously, you will find a blessing through them: be not prejudiced against them because of the formality of others. Do not suppose that the sermon is the only thing for which you are to

attend public worship: far from it: it will be your own fault if you get not spiritual profit from the prayers as well as the sermon.

And, after these cautions, I must now address the formalists a second time, for the cure of their disease.

2. I will suppose, then, the persons whose good I have in view, and whom I call formalists, know themselves to be the persons spoken to by the marks already laid down. If they can be convinced that there really is nothing sincere toward God in all their worship and and duties, they ought in all reason to look upon them as Hezekiah did on the worship paid to the brasen serpent, and call it *Nehushtan*—a mere piece of brass—a nothing. And perhaps they will not dispute with me, that all those prayers, however loudly or however frequently repeated, which are uttered without meaning and without feeling, deserve no better character than I have given them: nay, must not they be abominable before Him who searches the heart? But you have a way of avoiding this conviction? 'You are sure you have a good meaning, and intend to serve God, and are affected with the matter of your devotions.' It may be so with some of you, and in some respects. But did you never read of such a thing as zeal towards God which is "not according to knowledge?" It is your case: you put your trust in these your devotions: you en-

deavour by them to purge your consciences, in your way, from guilt: by these prayers you would make amends to God for the sins that you have committed; and if you deign to pay any regard to Christ's merits, you join and couple them with your prayers and services, as *both together* contributing to procure you the favour of God and the pardon of your sins. How contrary all this is to the essential doctrine of justification by Christ *alone*, has often been declared. Salvation is "not of works, lest any man should boast." The Lord's design in the Christian religion is to humble men; to make them know and confess that they have no works to plead before God; to bring them to say from the heart, "I am carnal, sold under sin;" "in me dwelleth no good thing:" and he would further, besides the knowledge of the Fall, have them to present their supplication before him as Daniel (chap. ix.) does, and as our Church in the Sacrament service, Not for their righteousness, but for his own great mercies. You see, our righteousness and his mercies are *not* to be joined together as a ground of dependence, but to be separated. And this expression of Daniel's has peculiar force in the chapter in which it stands, because he is just afterwards favoured with a view of what is a just ground of dependence, as clear a one as any in all the Old Testament; where you may read how Messiah the Prince is prophesied of, to be

revealed seventy weeks of years (that is, four hundred and ninety years) after the decree for rebuilding Jerusalem; which noble prophecy was fulfilled in the appearing of Jesus Christ at the time foretold. But what was he to be revealed for? The account is very remarkable: to "finish the transgression; and to make an end of sins; and to make reconciliation for iniquity; and to bring in everlasting righteousness." This is the just—and, oh! it is a most precious—ground of dependence for a sinner. But, then, if Christ do all this—end my sins, make reconciliation for them, and bring in everlasting righteousness—my prayers, or any other duties, do it not. The honour must not be shared between him and me. He will be the whole Saviour or nothing to me. "If by grace, it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace," says St. Paul. —This is not a little matter. It is of the highest importance whether God and his Christ are to be honoured by us aright. What is of such great importance? The very spirit of heavenly happiness lies in singing salvation "to God and the Lamb." We must never think of joining this worship if we do not submit to it here sincerely. I say, then, though you do pray very earnestly in some parts of worship, yet your self-righteous spirit spoils the whole, and robs you of all Gospel sincerity. But, indeed, your want of true sincerity is much increased, because you babble with your lips

the prayers of the Liturgy, to which your hearts are contrary. With your views, you might with more consistency join in some other sort of worship than that of the Church of England; for in that you profess to say, "there is no health in us;" and in the Sacrament service you confess the "burden of your sins to be intolerable;" and you call for "mercy" again and again, as "miserable sinners;" and you pray again and again for the inspiration and illumination of the Spirit of God; and I could shew you in every page, as it were, how the whole structure of the Liturgy contradicts your plan for salvation. Must not this be abominable in the sight of God, day after day to offer him prayers which profess the very contrary of that which you are constantly aiming at? Let me desire you to take the Common Prayers into close study and meditation (I mean, at home, in private), and see whether you have not babbled them for years, without entering into their real plan and design; nay, proceeding quite contrary to them. Sure I am, the men who composed them had views quite contrary to yours.

Enough has surely been said to shew you, formalists, that really you have for years been only offering incense to a brasen serpent—I mean, have done nothing better than the Israelites. Let me desire you, then, to consent to have it broken to pieces—I mean, give over trusting in these things: I do not mean

give over attending public worship. See your vileness and wickedness; rank yourselves in the same class with the vilest and profanest of men; know the Fall, and know your need of being saved by grace. When it is said of Hezekiah, he brake the serpent, and called it Nehushtan, it is added in my text, "he trusted in the Lord God of Israel." It is needful for you to pull down all this rubbish of your own; and there is no room to lay Christ the foundation, or to bring your hearts to trust in him truly, till this be done. Perhaps you may have seen so much of Scripture light, as to own in some sense that men can be saved only by trusting in Jesus. It certainly is so, in the full and plain sense of the words: and this, your trusting in Christ, is hindered, and will be hindered, while you trust in these other things. Here is the struggle: you would not wish to be without an interest in Christ, and yet would retain these false confidences. But, as St. Paul told the Galatians, "if ye be circumcised"—trust in circumcision, is his main idea—"Christ shall profit you nothing;" so say I unto you, While you trust in these your formal duties, Christ shall profit you nothing. For, besides that they contradict, as has been shewn, the Lord's plan of salvation, they evidently produce no holy tempers and dispositions; as you might see, if you were not blinded by mean self-love. They do nothing for you, in short. Down with these idols!

down with them, if ever you mean to have part in Christ.

If you are not yet convinced, look at St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians (chap. iii.) Study it attentively. He bids us in it beware of such confidence as yours: for the Jews then put the same trust in circumcision as you do in your formal prayers. He tells us how he himself had once "confidence in the flesh," and had as good pretensions that way as any man, from his religious education, strict attention to religious duties, and blameless moral conduct. But, mark him: "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." The very idols you boast of and depend on, he calls dung: if this will not convince you, you are beyond the reach of any Scripture evidence I can give. But there is One who can touch your heart, and He only can do it effectually: He can make you feel yourselves vile, helpless, and undone sinners, with all your religious duties; and make you feel, as our Church speaks in the Office for Visiting the Sick, that there is no other name under heaven whereby you can be saved, "but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." I pray God to do it for you!

I know I have said unpleasant things to your spirit. For a man to give up idols he has long nourished, is painful. I have deliberately chosen to incur your displeasure this day, rather than not be faithful to your souls; and if only one of you be delivered effectually from this snare of Satan, I shall rejoice, and be richly repaid for the ill-will of the rest. But my soul would long for you all, who are in this self-righteous state; because I know what a flattering state it is by experience, and am as certain as the word of God can make me, it leads to ruin. Christ cannot be your Saviour, fellow-sinners, till you give up all, and trust him alone. It is not in this discourse that I call you to any particular works or duties, to any thing which requires the motion either of hand or foot—though, after you be converted, there are many good works which you should all your days labour to abound in;—it is a change of view, of plan, of heart, that I press on you; and which, if once you come under that blessed influence of the Holy Ghost, which I beseech you to pray for, may be brought about while you are sitting still, or even in an instant. But, suddenly or gradually—for that I pass not—I wish you to know it. Down with all idols; see yourselves destitute of health, and naked, and exposed to the just wrath of God. Call your own righteousnesses *Nehushtan*,—an insignificant

piece of brass. Despise them all, and look to Christ as a most excellent Saviour. There rejoice and have peace; and thence learn to worship God by the Liturgy in a spiritual manner here, and, having served him faithfully, to worship in his courts above for ever.

SERMON XXXI.

SUCCESS OF FAITH SHEWN IN THE CASE OF HEZEKIAH.

ISAIAH xxviii. 12.

To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.

My intention from these words, with God's help, is, to lay before you the manner of acquiring the true rest and peace of conscience. It is a subject I have often spoken to; nor do I think it ever out of season. While souls are awakened to a sense of sin, and a desire of deliverance; while those who have once attained peace in God's way of justification are apt to lose it again, through carelessness or self-conceit; while a devil exists who sows tares among wheat, and darkens the truths of God by jumbling them together in an incoherent, ungospel-like manner; so long it will be needful for ministers to repeat again and again to their hearers, 'This is the rest for the weary, this is the refreshing:' though, still, many will "not hear," as the text complains. Those whose consciences have not

been seriously exercised with a sense of sin, may, indeed, think it not worth hearing; but I am persuaded, every soul that knows what God is, and what man is, will look on the Scripture way of rest as a great and heaven-taught way, and that requires indeed (as it is in the chapter of my text) "precept upon precept" for men to understand and make use of it, so contrary is this way to all that human nature, in her present dark, corrupted state, would suggest. And, truly, by this it is that pulpit-work is a work of business and im-importance. What do we expect to hear from this place? Is it an agreeable piece of oratory; a pleasing discourse, which we may admire for the moment, and then think no more of it? Is it something to cavil at; something to compare with some other sermon or book; something to speculate on at ease? Truly, so to hear is to trifle with the Lord's ordinances. If we know what we are doing—we preachers and you hearers—we are to set forth, and you are to receive, that which gives true rest and peace to the soul, and fits it for the delightful service of God both here and hereafter. If this end be not kept in view, you and we do worse than trifle: we mock and affront the Lord. Let, then, every man of us recollect, that he has business to do here. Let burdened consciences particularly consider, 'We should be hearing what may give us peace, and, by consequence, win us to the love of God.' If

one burdened soul shall receive profit by the representation of the way of peace, it will amply requite me for the sneers of hundreds of caviling disputants, for the scoffs of many unhumbled souls, who deride the ways of godliness altogether.

We will, then, 1st, endeavour to open the doctrine; and, 2dly, to apply it to different cases. But who will pray one moment with me?—O Holy Ghost, the Comforter, have mercy on us miserable sinners! We would be using thy means: but without thy influence we use them in vain. Shine on thy word: shew Christ therein to us: reveal him in us; that we, wretched, guilty sinners, may find in him a rest to our souls that will abide, and be fruitful in righteousness, to the honour of the Father and the Son, through eternity!

1. In the chapter of the text, and, indeed, for several chapters in succession, the immediate subject of Isaiah's prophecy is as follows. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, at the head of a mighty army, was desolating the countries near to Judea, and threatened soon to carry away the remaining two tribes into captivity, as his father, Shalmanezer, had carried away the ten. Hezekiah, king of Judah, had no force at all to compare to that of the Assyrian: nevertheless, in the Lord he trusted; and, having a positive promise of deliverance by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, he rested on

the word of God, and took all imaginable pains to persuade his princes and his people to stand out courageously against the Assyrian, mighty as he was, and to rely on nothing but the Lord against him. Neither his nobles nor his people were, in general, so simple and faithful in their adherence to the Lord God of Israel as the king was: they are called "an hypocritical nation." Although they had joined in the reformation of the godly king, they had done it in hypocrisy. They had no idea of trusting to the word of the Lord; and therefore, notwithstanding the word of God, and the command of the king, like rebellious children "they took counsel, but not of God; they walked to go down into Egypt, and asked not at God's mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt." Though the Lord assured them (Isa. xxx.) that the strength of Pharaoh should be their shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt their confusion; that the Egyptians should help in vain, and to no purpose, and that their strength was to sit still; yet they regarded him not. In vain he proclaimed, "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength;" or, in the words of the text, "This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing:" they would not hear.—The scornful men that ruled the people in Jeru-

salem, still made lies their refuge, and under falsehood hid themselves. Yet the Lord testified, "Behold, I lay in Zion, for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste"—shall not be in that confusion and dismay which causes a person to haste in trepidation. This living stone is the Lord Jesus Christ: in the second chapter of St. Peter's First Epistle you will find a beautiful comment on the words: "To them that believe", in him "he is precious" indeed. Now, it was on account of His merits, and the promises of God in Him, that the church in Hezekiah's time was to be preserved from Sennacherib: on His account alone it is that the church of God, before his time and since, in spiritual and temporal things, is saved and defended: and the right spirit with which Hezekiah was influenced, and with which his subjects ought to have been influenced, was a spirit of dependence on God through Christ. Though the object of this faith was afterwards more clearly to be revealed, yet the Saviour was the same, and the faith, in its substance, the same. There is, therefore, not only an analogy, or apt comparison, to be made between the faith of Old-Testament saints and those of the New Testament; but really it is the same faith: and when Christ calls (as he does in the New) all the weary and the heavy laden to come to him for rest, it is a rest on the same founda-

tion, and attended with the same holy actings of mind and blessed consequences, as that of which the text speaks: "This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear." The rest and the refreshing is that, and only that, which comes from believing in Christ; and I think I have proved this to all who can judge of the matter.

It would carry me too far to quote any more passages of the prophet. For several chapters before and after the xxviiith this is the subject; and without attending to the political state of things which I have represented, they cannot be well understood at all. Let us, however, briefly inform you of the result, since it will strengthen our subject exceedingly, and prove that the particular instance, to which the rest and refreshing of faith in Christ is applied in the prophecy, did honour to the faith by its good success. All the schemes of the princes proved abortive. The Egyptians were allies of no value: Sennacherib raged victorious through Judea: Jerusalem alone had escaped his hands. The Lord suffered thus Hezekiah's faith to be tried, and the hypocrisy of his people to be chastised. Their own help was to be proved null and insignificant, and then the Lord steps in to save; and as the work is all his own, so the glory of it is manifested to be his also. Instances of this, in abundance, the Scripture

gives us. The believer knows them, and can give similar ones from the dealings of God with his own soul. Great indeed was the deliverance; the rest of faith did not disappoint him. There are few of you but may know, that in one night the angel of the Lord smote in Sennacherib's camp "an hundred and fourscore and five thousand;" in consequence of which Sennacherib returned home in disgrace; and soon after, his own sons cut off this ambitious tyrant from the land of the living. Thus, constantly, in the Old Testament, the precious doctrines of the Gospel are taught by types or shadows, as through the Books of Moses; or by some remarkable portion of Jewish history, as by the history I have recounted.

2. In what follows we shall, then, apply, as both the Apostles (Paul and Peter) do, the subject to the doctrine of justification by faith in the righteousness of Christ.—It is not every one that is fit to consider this subject, and apply it to his conscience. It is the most precious doctrine in the world; yet it may be, and it has been, most dreadfully abused. Nevertheless, a true doctrine it is: and the only way of salvation is set forth in it.

I suppose a person to be in his own eyes guilty, and affected with the view of God his Judge, and of the most holy Law of God, the rule of judgment. He has a sight of all his own righteousnesses being filthy rags: his mouth is stopped: he has nothing to say for

himself: and he is as helpless in himself for the time to come as for the past. Do you subscribe to this character? If you do not, we have nothing further to say to you at present. Christ "came not to call the righteous, but sinners:" "they that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Would you follow my advice, I should, with a charitable view for your good, send you to the Law and to your own heart, to study both with prayer; for, truly, as you are, justification is a subject you are sure to mar if you meddle with it: it belongs to self-condemned criminals.

It is not to be expected, that we should fully handle every subject in one discourse. I have often set forth the Law of God, both as the school-master to lead to Christ, and as the rule of life. Sanctification, I know, is as necessary as justification; holiness as necessary as faith. But there is a nice management of these things needful, which I believe none can judge of but those whose consciences are exercised therein; and, therefore, all the knowledge of those whose hearts are unexercised with these subjects is, in my opinion, not to be envied. I look upon it as the awkward meddling of rude theorists, who know nothing by experience. The several branches of Christianity will check and balance one another, when each is fairly set forth without fear of imagined inconsistencies,—a fear which is no better than carnal policy, and is the pest and ruin of

Scripture knowledge. The branches must not be checked by inventions of man. Set every part of Scripture truth in a fair light, and each part will check its fellow, from the sweet harmony of the whole. I would not, then, be concerned if some fastidious critics should cry out "Antinomianism." It is sufficient, at present, to say, I am setting forth justification as the Scripture sets it forth, and as you yourself must be justified, if ever you be at all; and as to the charge of Antinomianism, I think it sufficiently answered by simply denying it most heartily.

What shall this poor sinner do? He is condemned, guilty, corrupt, and helpless, as we have said. He wants a rest and a refreshing to his soul. Is there any such thing in nature for him? His burdened conscience wants an abiding relief, that will stand both in this life and in another. He does repent; but his repentance he is not to look at for his rest: and yet, without repenting, he cannot look out for rest. I say, then, the Lord Jesus Christ, who bids all the weary and heavy laden to come to him and he will give them rest, He is "the rest wherewith ye may cause the wearty to rest," and He is "the refreshing." This soul sees sin as it is; and till he sees grace as it is he cannot rest. The tumult which the sight of his guilt has created in his conscience is only to be appeased by the sight of Christ taking away his guilt. The man's ideas are

judicial: God is the Judge, himself is the criminal; justice must be satisfied. Christ is the Law-satisfier, and he alone: Christ is the Lord his righteousness, and he alone. In brief, let him look to God, and plead before him, in a solemn cordial manner, the Lord Jesus, as the Surety of the new covenant, by whom he is delivered from the Law, and in whom he has a justifying righteousness. That righteousness let him plead, and trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God; and let him never trust in any thing else. Let him believe in him that imputeth righteousness without works.

And I will add, here, two things.—1. When he is brought to this lesson, so contrary to nature; to this view of Christ, so contrary to the world's religion; he will find rest for his soul. Peace of conscience he cannot attain till he thus unfeignedly believe: till he has done with the Law as a covenant, and is sent to Christ alone for satisfaction, he lives not by faith. But when he submits to this, then he will find peace and joy, liberty and love.—2. As he has thus received Christ Jesus, so he must walk in him. There is really no other righteousness but this to trust to in the sight of God. His justification must be continued in the same way by faith. The rest and refreshment of conscience he first attained, can only be preserved the same way exactly. When he was first justified, it was a complete

justification; not only giving him the pardon of sins, but uniting him to Christ as his righteousness, and giving him eternal life itself. "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

How comfortable and glorious this is, I need not say. I know it staggers human belief much; and many have much to say against it. If they searched their own consciences more, and saw how impossible it is that any thing done by man can justify him in the sight of God, as well after conversion as before, they might better understand this subject. I believe no steady rest of conscience is to be attained but in this view of things. Christ's grace altogether must be looked to; self must be out of the question: justification must be seen complete by faith in him.

I know sanctification is as necessary as justification; and it will flow freely, and grow strongly, where justification has first taken place. But he that would maintain the peace of God, whenever he deals with God, must see himself a sinner, nothing but a sinner. He has sincerely repented, but here he must not know it: he has grown in holiness, and is growing, but he forgets it here: he brings to God nothing but Jesus; takes his stand among sinners; and, from first to last, he is justified

in the Lord, and in him he glories. However abused all this may be, set forth it must be, if we would speak what alone is the foundation of peace with God; and to guard against all abuses I would make it my constant aim. However, solemnly I declare, I know nothing but Christ, and him crucified, to trust in for my own soul; neither would I ever join any thing else with him.

Here is, then, the use of the doctrine analogous to the history of Hezekiah. Guilt, like raging Sennacherib, has taken possession of a sinner. Loth he is to come naked to Christ: he is apt, perhaps a long time, to try to avail himself of his duties, resolutions, and various works. But the Lord mercifully drives him from one lurking-place to another, till he really finds he has done no more by all his own righteousnesses than Israel did by the Egyptians; and guilt, like Sennacherib, is still pursuing him—(I am bold to prosecute the analogy on the Scripture authority I have given)—He lays himself down, spent and helpless, at length, on the Sure Foundation, the Lord his righteousness. There is an hiding-place: Christ crucified proves a sure friend. Now he knows peace: on Christ he learns to rest for sanctification as well as righteousness, and finds him to be both. But he is content with the continuance of his first justification. As God is truth, it will remain sufficient for

ever: he needs no other. He is as effectually delivered from guilt as Hezekiah from Sennacherib.

Men of the world, this is the rest and the refreshing of the weary: here is joy and health. But you "will not hear" this, as the text says. You 'have done your best!' and 'your hearts are good!' Ah, fools and blind! O that you might have your eyes opened to see the filthiness of your hearts! I do not expect you should at all relish what I have said; but if you could be persuaded to see yourselves aright, it would be—in however mean and homely a way set forth—it would be music in your ears, and life from the dead.

Weary and heavy laden souls, heard you the sound of the King of Saints saying to the prisoners, "Go forth?" To you he calls, 'Come and be free; here is rest and refreshing for you. Incline your ears: behold, and take hold of, God's everlasting covenant.' Now, do not trifle with your God and your own happiness: suffer not your convictions to remain upon you, and breed rust and poison; nor get quit of them by any comfort but that of Christ crucified for you. Wrestle with the Lord, that you may be free. If you sink into trifling, the Lord will withhold the Spirit of adoption till you be more in earnest with him. If you still seek, though in part, by the Law, you must sink into your nothingness again before you have a soul-cheering view of Christ's all-

sufficiency. Alas! your numbers are not many: nevertheless, you are the lambs of Christ's flock; to you he speaks nothing but comfort. For your sakes I have handled this plain subject: the Lord bless it to you. The sum of the instruction belonging to you is; 'Since you want rest, and see it is in Christ, and that he can and will give it you, sit down, ye mourners; loose yourselves from the bands of your neck, ye captives; thankfully accept the Saviour of the lost for yourselves, since he bids you taste and see that he is gracious. Receive him, and be happy!'

A word to *established Christians*, and I have done. If you have grown barren and cold, may not this be one reason, ye have not prized justification as ye should have done? Ye have thought yourselves above it, leaving it to your juniors in Christ's school. This is pride. Ye would grow in sanctification, but ye cannot; for ye build castles in the air unless ye build on Christ. And what is sanctification, but humility? and what is humility, but submitting to Christ? Deign, then, to come to Christ again: sit low before him. Consider, Christ is your all: view him as your Saviour again; and, taking him along with you, you will grow in holiness, and be happy for ever.

SERMON XXXII.

INDECISION EXEMPLIFIED IN ZEDEKIAH.

JEREMIAH xxxviii. 19, 20.

And Zedekiah the king said unto Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me. But Jeremiah said, They shall not deliver thee: obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the Lord, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live.

ZEDEKIAH the king, whose conference with Jeremiah the prophet is here recorded, was the last of the princes of David's family that reigned in Jerusalem;—a wicked prince indeed, but not so wicked as several that were before him. His character is a common one; and therefore the leading features of it deserve to be attended to. The people were immersed in idolatry and wickedness: many of them already had been carried captive to Babylon, and the power of Nebuchadnezzar soon threatened to swallow up the remainder. Several kings had in succession held a dependent and precarious sway under the Babylonian conqueror. Zedekiah was now the last of these. He had

broken his engagements of subjection, and provoked Nebuchadnezzar to besiege and menace the destruction of Jerusalem. In this state of affairs, the prophet Jeremiah all along denounced the Divine vengeance on the people for their sins; assuring them that God had given the whole land into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, as a punishment of their iniquities. Rebel against it as they pleased, it was God's will, and should be effected. He represented to them, that by their meekly submitting to the will of God, this chastisement might be much more tolerable, and have a sanctified issue; but that their withstanding Nebuchadnezzar to the last was equal folly and impiety, and would be attended with the most dreadful consequences. This humiliating strain of the prophet was highly offensive to the great men of Zedekiah's court, who seem to the last to have been infatuated with expectations of deliverance from Egypt: and the prophet, from their proud resentment, undergoes a world of persecution and immense variety of sufferings.

But I was going to observe the peculiarity of Zedekiah's character. He is not, like Jehoiakim his predecessor, a leader in wickedness to his courtiers, but is led by them. He sheds no innocent blood; he encourages no direct idolatry; he has some respect for Jeremiah, some reverence for Divine things. Hence, though he sometimes weakly gives up the prophet to the rage of his enemies, he at

other times protects him from them. Pitiable case! to have just so much sense of goodness as to be continually condemned in his own conscience for not practising it through the stronger calls of some base lusts. Well might our Lord insist upon the necessity of giving up the right eye and the right hand, since, whatever regard there be for goodness, if it amount not to a preponderancy above the regard for wickedness, no turning of the heart follows—that is, no conversion—and therefore no salvation. Suppose it true, that the hardened leader in wickedness, who never makes any attempts at all to amend his ways, never manifests any regard for goodness at all, be a worse character than these good-natured vicious men: poor comfort! to be entitled to one of the least scorching seats in the regions of woe and torment! In truth, conversion requires the whole heart; and unless the regard for God be stronger than for sin, you might as well not set out at all to be religious. Pride, and an excessive regard for his character, appear to have been the snares that ruined Zedekiah. And how common is it at this day, for the promising hopes of men in religion to be blasted by the same thing!—Nicodemus-like, in private he has a conference with the prophet, and begs of him direction from the Lord. The prophet assures him, that, if he would go forth and surrender himself to the king of Babylon's princes, he should live, and

his house and the city should not be burned with fire; but if he still persisted in the pride of his rebellion, he should be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon, and should cause the city to be burnt with fire. Now mark in the text what foolish and unreasonable fears and prejudices often keep men from doing their duty: "I am afraid," he says, "of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me." He lays open what it was that all along prevented his obedience,—the fear of shame and disgrace among men. He had acted foolishly in rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar: the submitting to him now, would be owning he had done wrong, and exposing himself to the contempt of his enemies. How often are men hindered from doing what they know to be the will of God, through fear of some imaginary evil! Oh the blindness and corruption of the human heart, that can knowingly sin without any fear of the eternal vengeance of God, and yet at the same time be afraid of things that have no grounds of fear in them, as Zedekiah was here,—to fear the scoffs and taunts of some poor brother-worms more than the wrath of Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell!

Jeremiah, though hardly used by Zedekiah, as the former part of the chapter proves, yet, like a truly good man, forgets his private wrongs, and seems in his answer much im-

pressed with generous compassion for the prince. "They shall not deliver thee," says he: those fears are mere imaginations: "obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the Lord, which I speak unto thee; so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live." The point of instruction conveyed here is, that, however we be pressed by an opposite lust, or by plausible appearances of things, yet still the voice of the Lord ought to be obeyed; and peace and pleasure will be the effect of such obedience. This was lost on Zedekiah: the next chapter shews him taken, losing his children, having his eyes put out, and led captive to Babylon, because he preferred his own lust and the regard for men to the voice of God. But what was lost on him is recorded, brethren, for our benefit; and may it this day, by the power of the Holy Ghost, speak to our souls! may we be persuaded to obey the voice of the Lord and live, even in those things that particularly thwart our inclinations, our fears, our prejudices, and corrupt affections!—Let us, then, endeavour to apply the doctrine thus laid open, in a more particular manner, first, to half-convinced persons; secondly, to persons really convinced of sin.

1. Are there not among us persons whose natural disposition and circumstances so much resemble Zedekiah, that, while I was speaking of him, they could not help making the application to themselves? You would be religious,

you would obey the voice of the Lord, but there are such and such difficulties to get over: you have some fear of hell, but more fear of some worldly evil; and pride and shame are continually suggesting excuses, and putting you upon delay, instead of practising now what you know to be your duty. Truly, you could like to please God: but you have got so many persons besides him to please; your pride requires so many sacrifices to be offered to it; and you have so many fears, quite imaginary ones too; so much sloth, that cries, "There is a lion without; I shall be slain in the streets;" that on these accounts you delay the surrender of your heart to God, and stand, as it were, in the mid-way between God and the world. Hence your conduct is fickle and inconsistent, and shews you to be true neither to God nor Satan: one day you can speak for God and goodness, and the next day deride them; just as Zedekiah one day orders Jeremiah to be put into the dungeon, and then inquires of him the word of the Lord. There are such and such sinful practices—(I shall name none; for I speak what belongs to persons in general, not with a view to some particular cases only)—but you have been addicted to these practices a long time. "Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the Lord, and leave them off," has been the cry of God in your conscience a long time. You have a world of excuses for the sinful practices, though you know the great motive with you

is the strength of corrupt inclination: you fear such and such things. But God bids you fear him, and tells you the supposed evils you fear are mere shadows, and that you never shall lose any thing by obeying the Lord.

Oh that you, whose consciences tell you you are the persons concerned, would be persuaded to obey the Lord's command! Will you continue still to set your imagination against the word of the Lord, and be more afraid of obeying than of disobeying God? Do you reflect, that death may find you thus disputing whether you will obey God or not? and then consider, that, whoever be right, you must certainly be wrong, who, for fear of men, or because of a violent natural inclination to the contrary, will not do what you know you ought to do. Why do you suffer Satan to get an advantage over you, by musing so long on the difficulties of a holy life? You fright yourselves with the idea of the shame and contempt, the mortification and self-denial, the watchfulness and labour, that belong to the Christian race; and so you keep back from striving to enter in at the strait gate, because you think you never shall have resolution enough to hold out to the end. You should consider, that, remaining as you are,—unconverted, and the slaves of sin in your practice,—you are sure to perish; and then, what ought you to do, but obey the voice of the Lord, which he speaks to you? so it shall be well unto you, and your souls shall

live. Do remember, that Jesus Christ bids you strive to enter in at the strait gate, and says, "He that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." Now, if Jesus Christ be indeed the new and living way to God, whose blood really cleanseth from all sin, and redeems to God, so that no one who seeks to him as a Saviour shall be disappointed; if he spoke truth when he said, "Seek, and ye shall find;" thou art utterly without excuse, who wilt not seek because of discouraging difficulties. Are his words to be regarded and credited, or are they not? Obey, I beseech thee, then, his word, and seek him in all appointed means; nor rest till thou find the day dawn, and the day-star rise in thine heart. Surely, when he shall shine to thy soul in his light and truth, thou wilt find it a soul-transforming glory. Thou wilt see how foolish it was beforehand to be afraid of difficulties, when, being in thy blind state, thou couldst form no proper judgment of the matter; how ill-grounded thy fear of not being able to hold out to the end was, when thou shalt now see thyself "kept," as it is written, "by the power of God, through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." In truth, the light and truth of God in Christ shining into the soul, changes the mind, and gives every object a new appearance. What was before mean, foolish, and gloomy, now appears grand, wise, and pleasing: for God leads the blind by ways

that they knew not, by paths that they have not known. It is yours, O sinners, to seek him, and expect to find his blessings, not to be discouraged because of seeming difficulties.

And yet, so prone is man to create to himself needless trouble, that many persons are for a long time hindered from practising what they know to be their duty, merely by reason of some strange conceit, some mole-hill exaggerated into a mountain, which dismays their souls, and keeps them from fearing what they ought to fear, while they fear where no fear is. But will you have Jesus Christ to save you? long you to enjoy the privileges he has purchased for sinners with his blood? then you are desirous to do his will, and you count all things but dung, that you may win Christ. Such as you have got above the fear of man, the prevalency of gross sins, and the pomps and vanities of this wicked world; and there may be in this house persons in the state which has been described, who are yet far enough from being happy, for want of communion with Christ.

2. These really convinced persons I had to speak to secondly.

What idol, then, stands in the way, and prevents this communion? It is self-righteousness which feeds your unbelief, and prevents your deliverance. And you may know it to be self-righteousness by such marks as these; Your conscience is frequently disturbed by the sense of omission and imperfection in your

duties: you labour to restore the peace of it times without number, and to no effect, by attempting to perform the same duties in a better manner. Now this is making your duties your Christ; for the conscience must be purged from dead works to serve the living God only by the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, according to that noble testimony in the Ninth of Hebrews. This very strong principle of endeavouring to pacify your conscience by yourselves, which is the essence of self-righteousness, if you know Christ aright you oppose and fight against, as your grief and burden, and both the enemy of Christ and yours. The ignorant Pharisee, indeed, follows this method of pacifying his conscience with success and with pleasure; for he knows no other method, being equally ignorant of Christ and of true holiness. But you to whom I am now speaking, who want communion with God indeed, can never rest in any thing that is imperfect, as all that is of mere man must be. Christ is of God made unto us righteousness, and there is your perfection; and till you find yourselves complete in him, you cannot rest contented in conscience. You pity those that can, because it is a false peace, and will leave them to perish at last, appearing without the wedding-garment of the Gospel, speechless before God, when he comes to judgment.

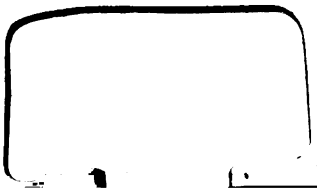
But how is this perfect righteousness, that gives peace to the conscience, and joy and rest to the heart, to be obtained and enjoyed? It is by believing the record that God gave of his Son: "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." Obey, then, I beseech you, O seeking souls, the voice of the Lord; so shall it be well with you, and your souls shall live. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved: trust the record concerning the efficacy of the blood of Christ to redeem the soul to God. Your natural reason will tempt you to lay no such great weight on the blood of Jesus Christ; you will rather be tempted to trust to your own repentance, or resolutions of repentance; but, truly, if ever you be purified in heart, and set at liberty to run the way of God's commandments, it must be by believing. Yes: believing in Jesus is the grand secret of living holily and happily. Let the self-despairing and heavy-laden sinner but once be grounded and anchored on the rock, Christ Jesus, and see that all the salvation which he wants is freely given him, bought with the price of Jesus' blood; then the true peace and joy is known to the soul; then all things become new,—new desires, new views, new objects of affection appear;—then those lusts and stubborn tempers, which the fear of hell could never overcome, are melted down by the sweet force of the love of Christ

constraining the soul; because she thus judges, "that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforward live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again." This is that happy change to real holiness of life, known and conceived only by the subject of it, which is the effect of genuine faith in Christ. The heavy laden soul is apt to entertain but poor conceptions of the efficacy of the blood of Christ, especially when guilt, darkness, deadness, and temptation prevail. It seems incredible, as it were, that a simple trusting to the blood of Christ, attended with a hearty suffering of the loss of all things, and counting them but dung in comparison of Christ, should be so mighty an instrument as to turn darkness into light, guilt into peace, hatred into love, heaviness into joy, and hell into heaven. Yet so it is, as every believer knows: by believing only could he get the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil. This, then, cannot be experienced before believing: these sweet effects of peace must be upon believing. How suitably, then, does the exhortation of the text apply itself to those who are wearied with the guilt and burden of sin, and yet cannot find in their hearts to cease from man, and surrender their hearts to the Lord Jesus! Whatever poor views of success, in the way of believing, your feelings may give you, yet consider it is God's way, and the only way of peace; that there is in nature no

other, and that he warrants the success of it. Obey, then, I beseech you, the word of the Lord; so it shall be well unto you, and your souls shall live. It will not be given you before-hand to see in what manner, by believing in Jesus only, you can be filled with all joy, with all peace, with all knowledge and goodness, and be made to abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost. It may appear to your clouded mind very improbable that it should be so. Believing itself, may appear to you a poor instrument, in comparison of some other more tempting and plausible schemes: nevertheless it is the Scripture way: it is the duty which you are called to discharge in your circumstances, as the unconvinced are to seek to Christ for their souls and to feel a general concern for their salvation. Nay, God himself entreats you to believe: "We pray you in Christ's stead," it is written, "be ye reconciled to God." Come to Jesus; and see that you really receive him for your whole salvation and desire, with no mixture of hope allowed from any other quarter. When the Spirit of God has brought you to this, how happy will you be! how will you be satisfied with the goodness of the Lord! and the water that he shall give you shall be in you "a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

FINIS.

ERRATA.

Page 67, line 17: *for* "a man has," *read* "any man have."
— 121, — 7, 8: *Dele inverted commas.*
— 147, — 3 from bottom: *Place inverted commas before* "were."
— 185, — last: *After* "Depart," *add* "from me."
— 216, — 8: *Remove inverted commas from before* "For," *to before* "all things."
— 264, — 6, 9: *Dele inverted commas.*
— 296, — 5: *Before* "Israel," *insert* "that."
— 313, — 7: *After* "why," *insert* "then."
— 321, — 18: *Before* "sup," *insert* "will."
— 329, — 19: *Remove inverted commas from before* "And," *to before* "the."
— 420, — 8: *Before* "straw," *insert* "a."

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